

Knitted Geographies: Materials, Making and Creativity

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Laura Elizabeth Price, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____

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Abstract

This thesis explores, broadly, contemporary enthusiasm for craft, making and its geographies. It engages with knitting and the spaces that the practices, politics and skills of this particular form of vernacular creativity play out. Politically, it is interested with knitting as being taken for granted and how this is intimately related to its complex geographies of domesticity and its relating of public and private spaces. Methodologically, it engages with how to research 'making'. Using feminist, participatory and embodied geographies, the thesis explores ways of researching making, the role of researcher skill and enthusiasm in researching amateur creativity, and the ways that exploring craft and knitting involves particular forms of storytelling. The empirical research for the thesis is based in the UK, principally in London and the North West of England. The thesis develops its concerns across three core empirical chapters. Firstly, it explores knitting festivals and events where craft consumption takes place. This section explores the affective atmospheres of knitting festivals, their spaces, practices and the people who attend them. It engages with broader classed and gendered geographies of consuming differently or ethically. The second empirical chapter explores knitting groups and engages critically with contemporary celebrations of making as connecting. Through various case studies it explores what it means to make together, examining knitting groups as spaces of care, friendship and therapy. It also explores the value of making alone and introversion in the context of a contemporary buzz around making and communities. The final empirical chapter explores yarnbombing as an urban intervention and knitting as activism. It asks questions about gender, craft labour and the material of producing this knitted street. These chapters represent a critical engagement with making and particularly knitting and its collaborative, interventionist and alternative geographies. The thesis concludes by sketching out the 'knitted geographies' of craft, creativity and materiality that sustain enthusiasms for making within communities and spaces.

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It's so easy to laugh
It's so easy to hate
It takes guts to be gentle and
kind

I know it's over, *The Smiths*, 1986

Chapter One

Introducing: threads, textures, and techniques

Why knitting, why now?

This thesis is about knitting, exploring the social and cultural worlds of knitters and the things that they make. It examines the ways that knitters consume, connect, and intervene in these worlds. It developed from popular and academic debate and attention around the ‘revival’¹ of knitting. The UK Hand-Knitting Association now estimates the number of knitters and crocheters in the UK to be 7.5 million (UKHKA, 2015). In 2014, crochet came in at number three of Google’s “how-to” searches of the year (UKHKA, 2015). However, as textile theorist Jessica Hemmings (2010; 9) puts it: “the resurgence of interest knitting enjoys today is not driven by the same motivations that shaped the popularity of knitting in the past. With our practical need for knitting long gone, this popular pastime now appears in unexpected guises with intentions and meanings that stray far outside the realm of the domestic and utilitarian”.

Central to this tale of the revival of knitting is the renegotiation and reimagining of the spaces and places of the craft and the identities of people who knit (Newington, 2014; Hemmings, 2010, Turney, 2009). The rhetoric that ‘knitting is no longer for grandmothers’ permeates narratives around the craft and its contemporary popularity. Knitting *now* is for young people, celebrities, and (for this historically gendered skill) men². For Parkins (2004; 436), reports of celebrities who knit represent “a clash of meanings between celebrity temporality (global travel, instant communication, the short lifespan of the “next big thing”) and a temporality of knitting (a slower, mindful use of time)”. Knitting, it is argued, represents slower, meditative and sustainable ways of being in the world³. Knitted objects are *made* meaningful by their social, material and cultural durability (Turney, 2014).

¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/she-said/2014/apr/09/knitting-and-needlework-relaxing-hobbies-or-seditious-activities>

<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/jul/06/wool-rise-knitting>

² <http://www.menwhoknit.com/>

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/may/16/knitting-yoga-perfect-bedfellows>

Over the period of 2007 to 2013 it was reported that wool sales rose from £180 million to £270 million (The Guardian, 2013). It has been argued that knitting; with wool and natural fibres in particular, is a more sustainable and less wasteful form of consumption in an increasingly throwaway society⁴. This chimes with debates within geographies of fashion that suggest an on-going descent into an industry founded on poor quality garments and based on fast, cheap throwaway fashion may be countered with ‘slow garments’ that are carefully crafted through design, materials and personal connections (Crewe, 2013, Crewe, 2008, Fletcher, 2008). Knitting then, may offer a *slower* alternative to fast fashion through the process of investing time, knowledge, and personality into the production of something more durable (Twigger-Holroyd, 2015).

Not only can knitting offer better connections to material things and clothing but, it may also offer an opportunity to make better connections in our social life and relations. Active knitting groups (sometimes referred to as ‘Stitch n Bitch’ groups), festivals, events and community projects sustain the ‘revival’ of knitting. Currently⁵, ‘Ravelry’ the social networking website for knitting and crochet has over six million registered users. As Hackney (2013; 187) suggests, “the great strength of amateur hobbyist practice is that it brings communities of interest together reflectively and reflexively through a shared love of “making”. So, then, making is connecting: to our things, to each other, to the communities that are formed around shared practice, skill and material knowledge (Gauntlett, 2011).

Together with this proliferation of knitting groups, festivals, events and fashion has been the development of a new cultural phenomenon of guerrilla knitting, or yarnbombing and the broader engagement of knitting to the **P**olitical – most particularly, contemporary feminism (see Busek *et al*, 2011; Minahan and Cox, 2007; Kelly, 2014). Concurrently, it sees knitting involved in urban **p**olitics and contemporary debates on forms of vernacular, tactical, or DIY urbanisms that are more everyday, amateur, participatory and community spirited than traditional forms of subversion and urban intervention (Iveson, 2013, Mould, 2014). Yarnbombing: the (sometimes illegal) act of placing something knitted into the urban landscape is a global phenomenon that has particular creative styles,

⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2013/feb/15/wool-makes-comeback>

⁵ As of February, 2016.

materials, and politics depending on location, production and availability of materials and space (see Price, 2015).

Alongside the growing interest in knitting as consuming, connecting and intervening there has also developed a broader geographical concern and intellectual enquiry into worlds of craft, making and hand-production. For some, this interest is pursued in context of the global potential of making and mending and the precarity of our material world under the Anthropocene: “the ability to work with materials, and to make, repair or repurpose physical things, are vital skills, for a future where such resources become increasingly limited and extreme events related to a shifting climate are more common” (Carr and Gibson, 2015: 3). For others, making becomes a geographical concern in the way local places, regions and communities are shaped by particular histories and schooling of craftsmanship, skill and knowledge (Thomas *et al*, 2013; Patchett, 2012; Hawkins, 2015). Here, the focus is on studios, museums, workshops, and galleries. More particularly, the focus on geographies of making addresses the distinct labour, bodily experiences, and social and material knowledges that define craft. Whilst also recognising the craft of work in industries such as cocktail making, or hairdressing, that may be less traditionally thought of as ‘craftsmanship’ (Ocejo, 2013, Holmes, 2014, Sennett, 2008). Throughout this engagement is a particular quality of craft as being maligned, underappreciated, undervalued, or in some way ‘in peril’ (Adamson, 2008). This is particularly so for knitting, and as I investigate in this thesis, this precarity and undervaluing stems from its social and cultural history as a gendered craft - as women’s work (Parker, 1989).

The gendered nature of this creative practice, I would argue, accounts for the academic oversight of knitting. Though geographers have engaged with knitting and its potential as feminist art practice (see Hawkins and Marston, 2015, Nash, 1996) there is little engagement with knitting as amateur or vernacular creativity. Indeed, wider sociological and cultural interest in knitting, never seems to fully move beyond acknowledgement of its ‘return’ or ‘revival’ to look at “the enduring presence of traditional textile technologies and crafts in contemporary societies, the significance of this, and the affordances this presents and sustains” (Jefferies and Were, 2010, 6). Whilst, Richard Sennett (2008) has urged engagement with

‘craftsmanship’ in contemporary society he does so in reference to the ‘craftsman’ rather than ‘craftswoman’. This thesis, then, is an attempt to rectify this oversight with critical and empirical engagement with the contemporary landscape of amateur hand-knitting. In doing so, it pursues a feminist geographical approach committed to representing multiple voices, bodies, participatory knowledges and attending to women’s spaces and practices.

The analysis is based on empirical qualitative research that was conducted in London, South East England, Warrington, and to a lesser extent Manchester, between September 2013 to January 2015. This involved participation in knitting groups, attending annual festivals, events and exhibitions and individual interviews. In total I engaged with over eighty knitters, and of these, I interviewed sixty. These knitters identified as ‘amateur’ knitters; I will qualify this status in more detail over Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

In this introductory chapter now, I present four key sections. Firstly, I present the theoretical and analytic framework of my thesis that uses knitting as a metaphor of investigation. In doing so it presents threads, textures and surfaces that underpin the research and the crafting of the thesis. Secondly, I introduce three case studies of artists: Clare Sams, Rachel Gomme and Kate Just, who use knitting in their practice. I do so to explore the nine key ‘textures’ of the research that bring together the conceptual underpinning and contribution of this thesis. Thirdly, I prescribe the three key areas of debate in human geographical enquiry, spanning theoretical, empirical and methodological concerns, which this thesis advances. I present the thesis as a feminist geography of making that uses empirical research to advance these debates. Finally, I present the structure of the thesis and provide an overview of each chapter.

Threads: crafting a thesis

To tell a story, then, is to *relate*, in narrative, the occurrences of the past, retracing a path through the world that others, recursively picking up the threads of past lives, can follow in the process of spinning out their own. (Ingold, 2007; 90).

In terms of process and method, knitting is defined as the act of making an unbroken surface from a single continuous line of yarn “formed into horizontal rows of individual loops that intermesh with each successive row of loops” (Black, 2012; 7). So then: “with each knitted loop, the fabric is formed and a deliberate hole made” (Turney, 2014; 29). In so doing, the act of knitting is precarious in that “where the loop is surface destroying, the knot is surface-creating” (Ingold, 2007; 62). In essence, then, through making, doing, and looping a knitted fabric is produced as knots are made with thread. As threads are joined together patterns are made visible – how these patterns look depends on tension, how tightly or loosely the yarn is stitched and how the final product holds together (Jubas and Seidel, 2016). In his reflections on the process of making things, Tim Ingold (2007; 41) suggests that the texture of materials and fabric only reveal themselves in the process of working with them. So, the feel of a knitted fabric and how it looks is dependent on the maker working with the texture of various threads. Tim Ingold (2010) uses this notion in an expanded sense; ‘threads’ can be made of various materials, but ultimately the texture of these threads is only revealed when working with them and in the production of a surface or fabric. When a knitted fabric is produced, then, it is a co-production of the maker (their skill, material knowledge, understanding of texture and pattern) along with the vibrancy of material itself.

I would like to introduce the metaphorical ways that I have understood my thesis process through knitting. I do so through referring to threads, textures and surfaces. Jubas and Seidel (2016), in their work on knitting in the (academic) workplace, have usefully employed knitting as a metaphor to explain their theoretical framework and to identify feminist ‘tensions’ and paradoxes that they work with and across. In knitting, tension refers to the how tightly, or loosely, fabric becomes knitted. This depends on the knitter’s comfort and ease with making: often, an anxious knitter may stitch too tightly which makes it difficult to undo stitches. Sometimes, a knitter may stitch too loosely. In this case, knitting may unravel more easily and holes may become more evident. For Jubas and Seidel (2016), referring to ‘tensions’ may allow feminists to articulate spaces and practices beyond binaries more easily. In order to introduce my own analytic framework, let me discuss the diagram below (see Figure 1.1).

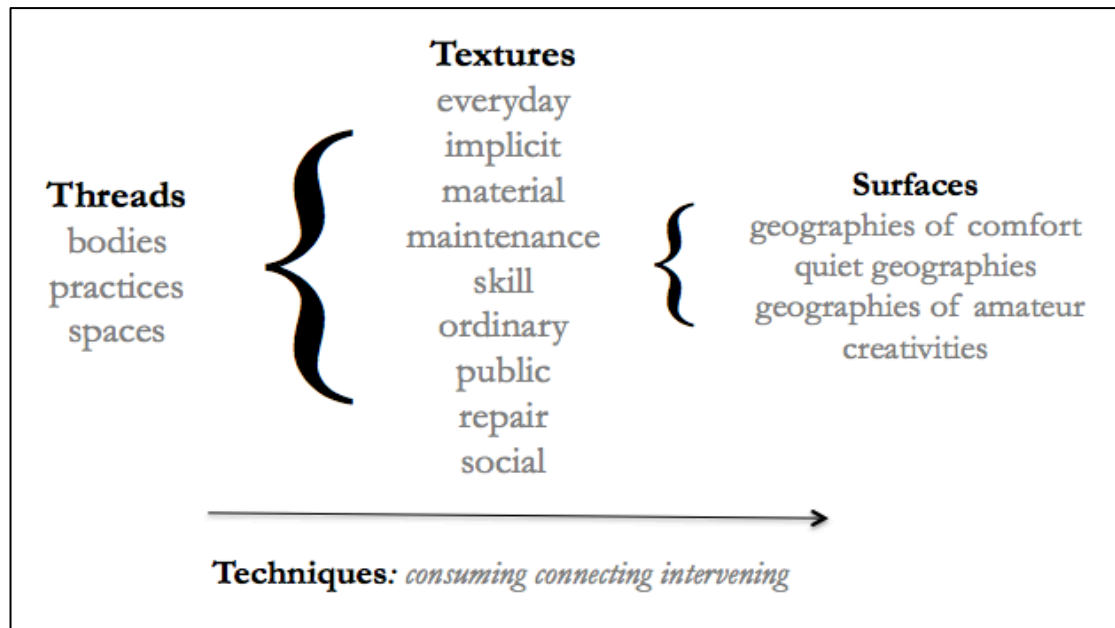


Figure 1.1 Feminist geographies of making: knitted geographies

Fundamentally the *threads* of the thesis are bodies, practices, and spaces: knitters, craft, and the creative spaces through which making takes place (events, home, cafes, community centres etc.). These *threads* have particular *textures* that are felt across each of these bodies, practices, and spaces. More broadly, the use of *texture* speaks to wider conceptual contribution of this thesis to feminist cultural geography and what texture can usefully unify in terms of conceptual contributions. For Crang (2010; 195) the value of *texture* as a concept has gone hand in hand with a re-engagement with matters of style and creativity: speaking to work on senses, embodiment, affect, and materiality within cultural geography.

The textures identified in the thesis reflect concerns from within cultural feminist geographies and run throughout each chapter and the thesis as a whole, working together to create *surfaces*. Jefferies and Were (2010; 9) suggest, “textiles appear to be about making things possible, fabricated surfaces full of potential, and through transforming surfaces, social thoughts and actions are transformed in the very process.” Indeed, surfaces are crucial to theories about the workings of the universe, variously: metaphysical, metaphorical, mythical, physical, personal, relational, and topical (Forsyth *et al*, 2013; 1018). The surfaces that are made, conceptually in the thesis, are geographies of comfort, quiet geographies and spaces of amateur creativities. Geographers have begun to emphasise the importance of engaging with

surfaces as a way of ‘uncovering underlying meanings, motivations, power relations, ‘feelings’, and processes of production: pushing beyond boundaries” (Forsyth *et al*, 2013; 1013). So then, surfaces are not static, but represent textures, processes and transformations that have occur, continue to occur and provide possibility for future transformation and exchanges.

I reflect on these surfaces established in this thesis more fully in the conclusion, but they are shaped, or transformed, by particular textures that run across three substantive chapters on consuming, connecting and intervening. These chapters then representing the *techniques* (the embodied doing, engagement with, skill, expertise, craftsmanship) through which the textures are brought to the fore in the production of surfaces. I will reflect on the surfaces more fully in the conclusion they bring together distinct feminist concerns with comfort (social, environmental, cultural, identity); quiet geographies (everydayness, implicitness, ordinary spaces that are neglected) and spaces of amateur creativities (gendered creative practice, women’s work and craft). These surfaces, I suggest, represent a feminist approach to geographies of making by bringing together key textures across bodies, practices, and spaces of a distinct form of making: knitting.

Textures: knitted art and themes throughout the thesis

Clare Sams: How did I get here?: material, ordinary, social

Figure 1.2 depicts textile artist Clare Sams making ‘knitted narratives’ during her residency ‘*How did I get here?*’ in 2013. ‘*How did I get here?*’ was part of Islington Borough Council’s ‘*A Million Minutes*’ project produced by AIR, through Central St Martins (see Fowler *et al*, 2014). AIR is a live project studio that nurtures a site responsive practice led by artists within the contemporary urban everyday. The project, based in Archway, London, explored what happens when artists stay in a place for a sustained period of time. One of the project spaces for this project was ‘*Windows*’ – a former retail unit on Junction Road, the high street that runs through Archway. Junction Road is filled with hardware shops, 99p stores and cafes. It is always busy, not least because it leads to Archway Underground station. Sams would sit in the window of this space, knitting – on her machine, or by hand, “there

is no difference because they're both a fluid part of my practice" (Interview, February, 2013). I use this case study to introduce textures of: material, social, and ordinary as depicted in figure 1.1.



Figure 1.2 Clare Sams, Windows. Author's own.



Figure 1.3 Home is Where the Arch Is, Clare Sams. Author's own.

The very term '*ordinary*' is thus grounded in relations of rule and power that become standard, common, and unremarkable (Staeheli *et al*, 2012; 631). Hayden Lorimer (2006; 86) called for geographers to engage with the habitual practices, intuitive acts and social protocols that draw together humans, objects and technologies. These taken-for-granted practices and relationships guide our lives and provide a kind of order, even as they may be difficult to pinpoint or articulate (Staeheli *et al*, 2012; 640). As part of Sams' project, residents were encouraged to share their stories of place and personal journeys. The stories shared were varied: some of these tales were small, vernacular, and anecdotal accounts of routine life and everyday mobilities in Archway.

Sams' work engaged with ordinary as a texture in two particular ways. Firstly, the site of the project itself was unremarkable, taking place on a busy highstreet as people did ordinary practices such as taking the bus, walking to work, or home, or shopping for groceries and hardware. In some ways intervening into these mobilities and ordinary practices, but in other ways calling attention to them by asking visitors to reflect, make, knit these practices for display in the window. For example, there were several knitted buses made during the project as people reflected on their commutes and rather mundane journeys taken to and from Archway.

Secondly, the project aims to show how ordinary practices, decisions, and spaces can have extraordinary potential. For example, Sams' knitted a long knitted strip that featured several black cats. This depicted 'Dick Whittington's' cat, and referenced Whittington Hospital in the area. Sue – a resident of Archway, who had shared her story with Sams, chose the iconography of the cat. Sue was in her late 80s, and had visited Archway only briefly in the 1980s for medical treatment. Through a series of unfortunate events this resident was forced to move permanently to Archway and displaced from her home of forty years in East London. Sue was unhappy about the move but commented that time had passed quickly and described the almost invisible way she had made Archway home: through everyday routine and regimes of care for herself that meant daily trips to and from the hospital became the norm. The repetitious nature of these practices

was habitual for Sue but through Sams' knitted art they were shown as both ordinary and *extraordinary*. This is a texture that appears throughout the thesis: the conjunction of knitting as both ordinary and extraordinary and its ability to work thus articulating broader feminist conceptual concerns with the creative force of paradoxical spaces and the spatiality of the in-between (Rose, 1993; Desbiens, 1999).

Urban geographers have called for attention to the materials, materiality and objects that make urban spaces and the role they play in producing conviviality and sociality in these places (Amin, 2008; Latham and McCormack, 2004, Koch and Latham, 2013). Ash Amin (2008; 12) explains, "the movement of humans and non-humans in public spaces is not random but guided by habit, purposeful orientation, and the instructions of objects and signs. The repetition of these rhythms results in the conversion of public space into a patterned ground that proves essential for actors to make sense of the space, their place within it and their way through it". Focusing more explicitly on the materiality of buildings and clothes, Louise Crewe (2010; 2016) argues that both are performative elements of everyday life: "they produce emotions, sensory experiences, and feelings, and engender memories". *How Did I get Here?* is fundamentally about how materials could tell stories about relationships between people, place and space in Archway but it was also about the importance of material things and their role in crafting these relationships.

The texture of *material* is pronounced in Sams' work in two ways. Firstly, it draws attention to the materials of everyday life that are important to people in their experience of place. As Crewe (2010; 2106) suggests, "like the memories enshrined within our special clothes (the great night out, the worn-in worn-out jeans), buildings too are sensory spaces that hold personal memories and feelings." There were various houses and homes knitted by Sams, along with long stripes of knitted roads and railway tracks. These bricks, mortar, metal tracks, tarmac, road signs were all important to the stories told by people in Archway. As knitting is produced around these busy lives it gives ordinary practices (routines, routes, journeys, biographical narratives) a material life whilst also recognising the affective, emotional worlds that are sustained and co-produced by material objects and our sensory experience of them (Miller, 2010, Miller, 2008, Attfield, 2000).

Secondly, Sams' project highlights the particular material qualities of knitted fabric that does justice to these affective, emotional worlds in meaningful ways. For Amy Twigger-Holroyd, (2010; 132) hand-knitted items connote longevity and durability; they are able to create strong emotional ties to clothes, objects and things, in a world where we are increasingly divorced from the production of the items we use and consume. Throughout this research I engage with the particular vibrancy of knitted fabric, and materials such as fibre, yarn, wool and their affective capacities to deal with unexpected geographies. Sams' works with acrylic yarn because it is more affordable for participants if they would like to take part, and it is easier to care for than woollen fibres. Sams' explains, "I like to use the medium of yarn to deal with uncomfortable subjects; it gives them a tangibility that is uncanny, uncomfortable yet materially and texturally comforting". Figure 1.3 depicts knitted Archway Bridge: a well-known suicide hotspot in the area. Sams' knitted the bridge as a way of including geographies of mental health, exclusion and death in her project. Infact, many of the stories that Sams knitted belied the alleged cosiness of their materiality. It is at this conjuncture of the material, immaterial, symbolic and representative that I explore knitting throughout this thesis and the potency of what fibres can do.

Ravetz *et al* (2013; 2) explain "anthropologists and archaeologists have long assumed that many of the properties associated with craft – materials, tools, techniques of the body, practical skill – are highly social and open to shared working (...) Furthermore these properties are understood by some social scientists to be the means by which human beings and their environments are co-created and coexist". Notably, David Gauntlett (2011; 2) suggests 'acts of creativity have an inherently social dimension, as making and sharing things increases makers' engagement with their social and physical environments. *How did I get here?* was an exploration of knitting as a social craft, and the idea that making things together, or making things for shared projects might infer social transformations within the community. *Windows* took place on a busy high street, thus encouraging residents and passers-by to reflect on these knitted narratives and what they could mean. The public display of knitting encouraged people to stop, observe and question Sams' work, as evidence by fieldnotes from my visit to the workshop:

“As we’re talking there’s a knock at the door. It’s Simone who promised Clare some hand-knitting. She’s working on knitting the ‘Archway Tower’. She says she’ll be back soon with her work. She leaves. There’s another knock at the door. This time it’s an elderly man. He’s just ‘popping in’ to tell Clare that he thinks the space is fantastic; he’s got loads of stories to share if she needs them. Moments later, Simone returns with her Archway Tower, knitted. At first, Clare is a bit gutted because rather than a knitted *picture* of the tower it’s a piece of grey knitting with ‘ARCHWAY TOWER’ written in pink. But, the make is a thank-you, a gift, to Clare for teaching this Simone to ‘write’ with knitting.”

(Clare Sams, Fieldnotes, March 2013)

Clare Sams stayed in the space for a period of two weeks and, as I mention in the fieldnotes above, developed networks and relationships with people in the area who contributed knitting to the project, such as Simone and her piece, ‘Archway Tower’. The piece itself was not as Sams’ envisaged but it reflects the notion of knitting as social and generous: of time, of skill (sometimes to less able skills), of stories, and materials. These are themes I explored through the thesis whilst cautionary of the geographies of generosity and uncritically celebration of knitting as ‘social’ recognising that expectations, like Sam’s image of knitted Archway Tower, do not always match up.

Rachel Gomme: A Year of Waiting: skill, implicit, maintenance

Figure 1.5 is a section of the work by performance and textile artist Rachel Gomme called ‘*A Year of Waiting*’ (2010). For one full year, Gomme knitted each time she waited for public transport; she then sewed together these swatches she had produced, as shown above. Each time she knitted she used a different colour. When she displayed the finished piece she used loose single yarns, which directed to hand written information about *where* each section was knitted. *A Year of Waiting* told a personal geography of Gomme’s experience and reflected her own routines, rituals and journeys. The finished piece was four and a half meters long: a material accumulation of expecting, anticipating, and reflecting. I use this case study to introduce textures of: skill, maintenance, implicit as depicted in figure 1.1.

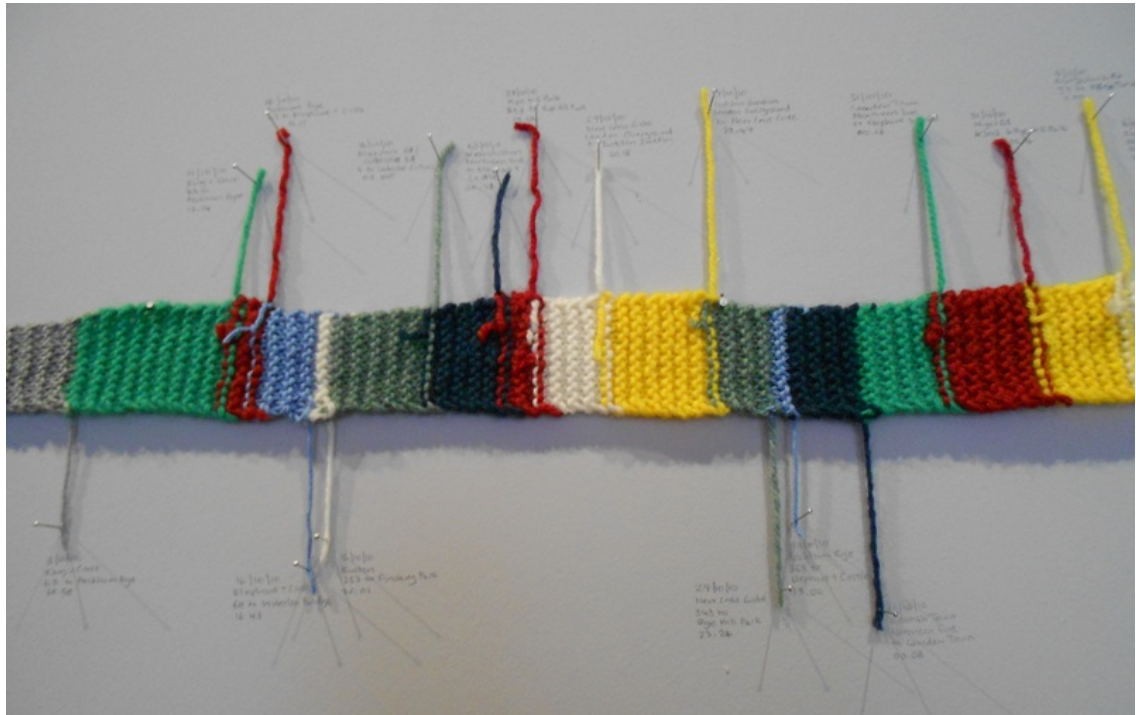


Figure 1.4 *A year of waiting*, Rachel Gomme (with permission from artist).

I use the case study of Rachel Gomme now, to introduce the texture of *skill*. Tim Ingold (2000; 350) states that skill is a social and material practice. It is a process that is distributed across bodies and context; a form of knowledge that is not localised in individual bodies but rather assembled across social and geographical settings (Lea, 2009; 465). Gomme readily ‘performed’ her experience of crafting thus drawing attention to the ways that knitting is an embodied practice. As a proficient knitter Gomme felt comfortable and able to knit in various places and as such passed time through a ‘feeling of flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). This feeling of flow describes the feeling of being so involved in an activity that time passes quickly and the line between task and world becomes blurred. This feeling requires a degree of skill, which allows the body to move with little conscious direction (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Gomme was interested in interrogating the notion of the idea of ‘waiting’ as “being about unproductive time, about it being a waste of time, as though the future or the destination is the point” (Interview, December 2012).

Throughout my research, knitters often articulated ‘feeling flow’, and the experience of passing time by feeling totally absorbed in a project. It is a texture that appears throughout my research and I will revisit in chapter seven. Pitt (2015; 86) suggests that “the concept of flow needs to be emplaced to consider how forces beyond the

individual shape momentary experience. Places conceived relationally comprise a complex of social, material and natural processes crossing various scales”. Gomme wished to draw attention to the potential of skill that is both simple and complex. Gomme enjoyed how the simple knit stitches neatly displayed the passing of time: time spent waiting at the bus stop, time invested in skill that represents a history of craft, development of technique, and material knowledge. Throughout this thesis I will engage with the histories of craft and knitting and how they inform the perception, and affective and emotional potential, of knitting today.

The texture of *implicit* infers indirectness, tacit and unspoken gestures that are “modest, quotidian, and proceed with little fanfare” (Horton and Kraftl, 2009; 21). Eleanor Jupp (2008; 341) has urged geographers to value the political and socially transformative potential of “seemingly everyday interactions and practices” and “the provisional and precarious nature of emergent connections and feelings” (ibid). The work of Rachel Gomme is quiet, contemplative and conditional – it fits into the pockets of time that are often deemed “wasted” or trivial. Rather, by actively materializing these periods, Gomme draws attention to the material power of what can be achieved in small moments with modest aims and objectives. The final piece of work then, is colourful, and shows the power of the work on going, quiet work that adds up into something more extra-ordinary when sewed together.

Conceptually, Gomme wished to show the labour of waiting: “I wanted to appreciate time by maintaining this practice over the course of a year – it is laborious. I wanted to show that materially” (Interview, December 2012). Building upon the texture of skill this case study introduces the notion of *maintenance* by calling into being the on-going embodied skill, labour, and time needed to maintain craft, bodies and spaces and the gentle productivity produced by the body that waits compares directly to the busy, bustle of the city. In the thesis I explore the notion of maintenance in both material and social contexts: the way that knitting maintains social relations, and the way that knitting and fabric itself requires maintenance through practices of darning, cleaning, unravelling and re-stitching.

'Knit Hope' (2013) was a public knitting project that took place in both Leeds and London, with each city producing their own HOPE banner. Australian artist, Kate Just, led it. Just attended local knitting groups in each city and encouraged members, if they had time, to make small swatches to contribute to the production of the banner. These swatches were made with fluorescent yarn – a colour that connotes safety, or perhaps, safety that has been compromised. As Kate Just explained: "In some ways, knitting has all of these connotations of comfort, cosiness, domesticity, or safety. I like the idea that there's this banner that's fluoro and it is reminiscent of a construction site or something. And it's knitted. So, I like to work with and against expectations of knitting – using materials like bricklayer's thread and plastic". (Interview, with Kate Just, 2013).

Just got to know the knitters well over a three-month period, splitting her time between London and Leeds in the process. When enough swatches had been made, Just then collected these individual knitted squares, produced by the groups, and knitted them together herself. Once the fabric had been made, Just used silver-steel coloured bricklayer's thread to write HOPE into the fabric and in October 2013 an event took place that saw Kate Just and amateur knitters (some of which were involved in the making of the banner) walk from iKnit London, near Waterloo Station across to Big Ben and the House of Parliament as a form of protest, or craftivism. I use this case study now, to introduce textures of: repair, everyday and public as depicted in figure 1.1.

Apart from the idea of HOPE, knitting itself actually represents hope – an enjoyable activity in life that can otherwise be stressful or bad a lot of the time for some people."

(Interview with Kate Just, November 2013)

Anderson and Holden (2008; 155) state that hope names "multiple practices that enable spatial and temporal reach and require constant, generative repair and maintenance" to reach the "not yet" that hope names as part of how of events take places. Put simply, hope demands *repair* and maintenance, but also these processes

require a degree of hope themselves. For Tim Dant (2012), the process of repair is not easy to plan or predict, it demands an emotional engagement that can adjust the human attention, sensitivity and effort to the objects being worked on. He continues that, ‘the repertoire of gestures, the variable range of emotions and the flexible gathering of sensual knowledge needed for repair work are all distinctively human capacities’ (Dant 2012; 18). This is reflected in Just’s reflection on the sewing together of knitted swatches to produce the banner:



Figure 1.5 Knit Hope, Kate Just. Author's own.

The case study of Kate Just and ‘Knit Hope’ illustrates the dual way that geographies of making also *make* geographies. More particularly knitters, throughout the thesis, articulate the idea of repair to material, social, and economic relations. To repair is to fix an object, but also improve the situation (that must be broken or unusable in some way). In this respect, throughout the thesis I will engage with an expanded notion of repair and explore how knitting works as a form of activism and enabler of change both in context of wider societal issues (loneliness, women’s access to public space, slow consumption rather than fast fashion) but also for personal issues (social, familiar relations and friendships): in short, repair might be a political activity in itself (Hall and Smith, 2014, 11).

An interest in the taken-for-granted, mundane routine activities of women's lives has long been central to the production of knowledge in feminist geography (Dyck, 2005; 233). This thesis is concerned with knitting and its relationship to women's *everyday* lives, and how knitting can tell stories of the taken-for-granted. Just explain how she frames knitting as a "common language":

"I guess it could seem exclusive because you have to learn to knit, not everyone can – so it has a language in that sense. But actually it's equalising and accessible because it's easy to make something with knitting with little skill and everyone its familiar with what knitting is."

(Interview with Kate Just, November 2013)

Similarly, to Clare Sams' engagement with ordinary space, Just was interested in knitting as materializing experiences, stories, and concerns of women and their everyday lives. As she explains:

"Each square of the banner bears the individual imprint of the person who made it weather it has a different pattern, or a different tension. The events, the knitting groups and the people are in the banner, even if they didn't make the walk. The language of their body, in a way, *is* in the banner."(Interview with Kate Just, November, 2013)

For Just, the knitting groups and workshops, and more explicitly the protest walk with knitted banner, provided alternative ways of being in everyday urban spaces that recognized the multiplicity of everyday experience and bodies. As Mott and Roberts (2014; 241) argue, "it is important to remember that the ways one goes about exploring are determined by, among other things, our unique personal identities, histories, and associations with place. An emphasis on an archetypal explorersubject serves to marginalize and exclude through an understanding of legitimacy as belonging only to particular bodies and embodied experiences". In this thesis I am concerned with offering alternative narratives and experiences to more masculinist approaches to creative practice and the city and this is a theme I will work with throughout the thesis.

The 18th June is World Wide Knit in Public Day⁶. It was started in 2005 as a way for knitters “to come together and enjoy each other’s company. Knitting is such a solitary act that it’s easy to knit alone somewhere and sink into your work without thinking about all the other knitters out there” (wwkipday.com, 2015). Bratich and Brush (2011; 236) argue that “knitting in public turns the interiority of the domestic outward, exposing that which exists within enclosures, through invisibility and through unpaid labour: the production of home life”. Running throughout narratives on contemporary knitting is the notion of knitting as having reached the public domain, rather than the historical spaces it is associated with: home, indoors, alone. As Bratich and Brush (2011; 236) suggest then, “knitting in public inevitably makes this question of space an explicitly gendered one”. As I mentioned above, Knit Hope involved a public walk across London.

The women that I walked with discussed how they felt protected and sheltered behind the banner as they made their way across Waterloo Bridge. At other times, they felt exposed. The fluorescent thread seemed to capture the light and draw attention to our bodies and the materialities of light itself. This echoed Edensor’s (2014; 436) assertion that “the melding of illumination and darkness has a unique capacity to transform space and generate atmospheres”. Yet, what Edensor (2014; 436) seems to have neglected in his discussions of materiality, light and darkness is the gendered experience of these dark, or light, atmospheres and how certain bodies may feel comfortable, or uncomfortable in darkness. Indeed, the walk itself was not well attended – not everyone feels comfortable with knitting in public, and in the rush to celebrate the conviviality of knitting I have been cautious throughout this thesis to pay attention to those ‘not in attendance’

⁶ <http://www.wwkipday.com/>

Surfaces

Geographies of Comfort

In this thesis I engage with geographies of comfort as a way of bringing together affective, material, and representational concerns articulated through the study of knitting, knitted fabric and makers and as a tool to explore social, material, and cultural notions of feeling comfortable, or disrupting comfort. Comfort has become a vital, emergent concern in a number of substantive fields within Human Geography, including work on mobilities (Adey *et al.*, 2012; Bissell, 2008); home (Brickell, 2012; Gorman-Murray, 2012; Racz, forthcoming); environment and environmentalism (Hitchings *et al.*, 2011; Spinney *et al.*, 2012; Vannini and Taggart, 2013, 2014); sociability in public space (Boyer, 2012; Eldridge and Roberts, 2008); and the body (Colls, 2012). Feminist geographers have argued that comfort has taken on gendered connotations, associating experiences of home, care and warmth with feminine experience and domesticity, and as such has concealed the politics, processes, making and re-making of spaces of ‘comfort’ (Brickell, 2012). Geographers, anthropologists, sociologists and historians have recognized ‘comfort’ as more than *just* an emotion through which we understand the world; rather, through its presence, absence and pursuit worlds are actively made and un-made. In advancing geographies of comfort, I advance wider geographical concerns with affective, emotional, and material geographies.

Quiet Geographies

Quiet geographies have been coined by Askins (2014; 354) as a way of doing politics that captures “quiet politics and embodied (re)productions of place”; referring to the everydayness, small, and slow actions that may work in some way towards change, social transformations in “a profoundly feminist sense that remains fragile, emergent, powerful and hopeful” (Askins, 2014; 354). Similarly to calls for slow geographies as a particular “feminist praxis that positions self-care and the creation of caring communities as a means of “finding ways to exist in a world that is diminishing” (Mountz *et al.*, 2015; 4). Feminist geographers then, are increasingly concerned with alternative ways of being in the world that are more inclusive,

caring, slow, and participatory and community minded, particular. This thesis advances debate in this area by engaging with women's stories of craft and knitting as a creative practice that shared feminist concerns both explicitly and implicitly in ways that are partial, incomplete, open, and situated.

Spaces of Amateur Creativities

Geographical research on the creative economy, alongside the cultural-social geographies of arts has led contemporary geographical engagement with creative practices. Such studies take form in explorations of creative cities, clusters or networks, the intersections of creativity and place, or making in the home or in the studio, or at the scale of the notebook (Bain, 2009; Edensor et al., 2009; Scott, 2002; Pratt, 2008; Harvey et al, 2013; Rogers, 2011; Sjöholm, 2012; Brace and Putra-Jones, 2010). Increasingly there has been a turn towards studies of more amateur, or vernacular forms of creativity. As Tim Edensor (2009; 1) puts it, “an understanding of vernacular and everyday landscapes of creativity honours the non-economic values and outcomes produced by alternative, marginal and quotidian creative practices”. This thesis advances debate in this area by engaging empirically with amateur makers, the spaces of that amateur creativity within and beyond urban areas, and the importance of gender in understanding amateur practice and the realms of leisure.

Structure of Thesis

Chapter Two positions the thesis in relation to wider bodies of existing scholarship. It reviews the relevant academic literature on ‘geographies of making’, relating this work to three broadly defined areas of research – academic investigations into knitting and craft, geographies of creativity and material geographies. Running throughout these engagements is a focus on feminist theories and concepts to understand the neglect of knitting in academic and popular culture, the gendering of creativity and the development of a feminist geography of making.

In Chapter Three, I discuss my methodological approach of ‘knitted geographies’ – an approach that involved collecting, making and stitching together stories of

knitters, knitting events and knitting projects that took place from January 2012 to January 2014. The chapter provides the reader with a range of information on: what research was undertaken, with whom and where; the methods deployed; the social relationships implicated in these methods and practices; and the wider methodological insights and arguments that shaped the work. I consider: my use of online research and social media; participant observation in identifiable knitting spaces and with knitting groups; the geographic locations of the research, and my recruitment of knitters who were not directly involved in knitting groups or events; and generally how the research process was one of collecting and connecting diverse stories and materials.

Chapter Four is the first of three chapters that present and interpret the empirical materials of the research. It discusses key contemporary spaces for knitting consumption, namely festivals and events, which celebrate the consumption of wool, yarn and fibre. The chapter develops its argument in six parts. Firstly, I outline the importance of knitting events and festivals as material sites of consumption and craft sociality. Second, I focus on the affectual materialities and embodied experiences of these events, emphasising their cosiness and seductive 'excess'. Thirdly, I explore how these festivals present the provenance of wool, through the material presence of sheep and their associated imaginative geographies of rurality and craft consumption as 'good and moral'. I then turn more directly to the people and socialities of festivals, and follow this with a discussion of how 'best in show' competitions are symbolic of a wider emphasis on 'sharing' with other participants. Sixth, and finally, I offer a degree of caution to characterising these knitting consumption spaces solely in terms of enthusiasm, material abundance and warmth, highlight some of the counter currents that may also make these sites of exclusion.

In Chapter Five I respond to claims for the social and emotional efficacy of making in general and knitting more specifically. By drawing upon empirical research within knitting groups, as well as individual knitters, I address five key areas. I begin with a discussion on the spaces of friendship and care created by knitting groups, with particular focus on the way that such spaces contrast from everyday social milieu. Looking at the ways that knitting emerges within networks of friendship and the

family, the gifting of completed work is considered too. I then elaborate on the material practices of knitting, which are a part of the collective life of a group. Using the example of ‘twiddlemuffs’, made for dementia patients by the Carers U Knitted group in Warrington, I consider how knitted objects lend agency to the group’s ethic of care. In a third strand of the chapter, I extend this analysis of care to discuss the role of knitting in caring for the self and in personal well-being. This is shown to relate both to the way that knitting fosters social connections and to how it transforms one’s sense of self through its embodied practice. In the fourth section of the chapter I consider the places where knitting groups meet as having an important role in the practice of knitting and connecting. Finally, the fifth section of the chapter draws on research carried out with ‘lone-knitters’. This develops an argument that knitting connects even when not undertaken in groups or public spaces. This confronts the tendency of popular accounts of collective knitting to ignore or ‘other’ the domestic and familial knitting associated with older generations of women.

In Chapter Six, I engage with the *production* and *making* of yarnbombing, with a focus on materials, materiality and craft labour. In doing so, I am concerned with precarity, transience, and ephemerality. Firstly, I start with the so-called ‘end of yarnbombing’ and the increasing use of knitted graffiti in branding, promotion and consumerism, which goes against the craft consumer ethics of its craft (Campbell, 2005). I do so to highlight the *precarity* of gendered craft labour (Hughes, 2011; Banks, 2010). Secondly, I engage with *transience*, by exploring the making, maintenance and repair of yarn bombs by the amateur knitters that produce them. Thirdly, I explore *ephemerality* in the context of documenting women’s histories and experiences of place through knitted interventions. Finally, in a coda to the chapter, I amplify the potential for yarnbombing and knitting to be a ‘quiet activism’ by returning to a different knitted intervention, Stoke Knittington’s miniature rendering of Stoke Newington Common.

Chapter Seven, by way of conclusion, I reflect on the conceptual contribution of the thesis to human geography, and more particularly, the ways that my research has contributed to the geographies of making agenda through feminist geographical enquiry. I revisit the nine textures introduced in this chapter to usefully bring

together empirical contributions throughout my thesis to explore their relevance to three surfaces: geographies of comfort, quiet geographies and spaces of amateur creativity.

Chapter Two

Making: knitting, craft and creativity

Introduction

The power and significance of creative material practices of ‘making’ – whether this be professional practices of craft, art or hairdressing, or amateur explorations of knitting or dry stone walling – has commanded increasing attention within and beyond Geography, both through publication (Sennett, 2008; Crawford, 2009; Charny, 2011, Anderson, 2014) and through institutional developments (e.g. the establishment of an interdisciplinary Institute of Making, at UCL, London). This scholarship takes a variety of forms including critical engagements with craft and vernacular creativities, artistic practices, or the extensive range of making practices studied under the banner of the creative economy. It not only acknowledges the social, economic, political and cultural potentials of these practices, but also increasingly does so by way of in-depth studies of the material, practiced and embodied dimensions of making. This represents, I argue, a requirement that we revisit and re-negotiate the spaces and practices of the production of things, and that we interrogate the politics therein.

Geographical research on the creative economy, alongside the cultural-social geographies of arts and creative practices, give us the foundation for these studies of the geographies of creative making. Such studies take form currently in explorations of creative cities, clusters or networks, the intersections of creativity and place, or making in the home or in the studio, or at the scale of the notebook (Bain, 2009; Edensor et al., 2009; Scott, 2002; Pratt, 2008; Harvey et al, 2013; Rogers, 2011; Sjöholm, 2012; Brace and Putra-Jones, 2010). The wider geographical recovery of the body and practiced ways of being in the world also present us with a new terrain across which to think through questions of making (Bissell, 2008; Ash, 2013, Colls, 2013). Such concerns have rich possibilities not only of extending our geographies of making, but also for reflecting on how a close attention to practices of making might enable us to extend and develop geography’s bodily concerns.

Furthermore, I argue, what must not go missing in geographical discussions of making is an engagement with the *objects* and *materials* being created and worked

with. This might include, for example, considering the multiple lives of things, reworking and extending biographies of objects via practices of, say, mending, repairing, up-cycling or other ways of creatively re-working objects, including second-hand consumption practices (Gregson and Crewe, 2003; Gregson et al, 2012; De Silvey and Ryan, 2014). In doing so, geographers reconsider questions of making and makers by questioning making as more than the simply human assertion of form onto static material. Making is, rather, a co-production that sees a human maker interacting with, and being shaped by, the animate matter being worked with (O’Conner, 2006; Ingold, 2013; Paton, 2013).

If the geographies of making are multi-faceted, then the geographies being made *through* these practices are equally important. Many claims are made for the productive force of making practices; whether this is around economic regeneration, place making or subject forming. In recent years such concerns have shifted from telling wider scale stories of cities or places shaped through creative production, to a concern with the productive form of making’s embodied and material dimensions. As such we see identity politics in creative making practices come to the fore, including reflecting on the role of practice and the agential force of materials in shaping identity especially at specific points in the life course such as parenthood or retirement (Bain, 2007; Yarwood and Shaw, 2010). One of the most acknowledged debates around the power of making has been its power to produce ‘connections’ and social relations. As David Gauntlett (2011) notes “making is connecting”. It is within this sentiment that I have produced the empirical material, explored in these chapters, as part of a critical reflection on the productive force of making.

Compositionally then, this chapter contextualises the arguments developed in the thesis by bringing together academic literature relevant to the emergent field of ‘geographies of making’. It is organised according to three main and widening areas of interest – the study of knitting and craft, geographies of amateur creativities and material geographies. These are woven together by concerns with gender, identity, bodies and materiality. Taken together, these areas and themes not only sketch the field for ‘geographies of making’ but they do so through a feminist geographical approach.

Knitted Geographies

Women's craft and feminist art histories

As Sandy Black (2012; 103) puts it: “knitting as a domestic activity is embedded in social history and the collective consciousness”. At its most basic, knitting is defined as the act of making an unbroken surface from a single continuous line of yarn “formed into horizontal rows of individual loops that intermesh with each successive row of loops” (Black, 2012; 7). It is vernacular craft traditionally made using a range of simple hand tools that were gradually refined from hand-carved sticks of wood, bone, quill, or ivory and regardless of regional variations the fundamental loop construction of weft knitted fabric is the same. Materially then, all forms of knitting have much in common in terms of origins, techniques and fabric structure – culturally, there are various variations in terms of technique, pattern, style and history. More divisionally, knitting as an industrial and domestic activity usually are rather different spheres. Jo Turney (2008; 8) has explored the culture of knitting and charted the history, development, geography, and relationship of domestic knitting to various social movements. Whilst knitting remains both an industrial and domestic activity today, each is a completely different sphere. However, in both of these domains it is argued, “when one first thinks of knitting, one still thinks of women” (Turney, 2009; 8). So then, knitting is historically, socially, economically, and culturally a gendered activity associated with the lives and experience of women (Turney, 2009, Newington, 2011, Hemmings, 2010).

Before exploring contemporary amateur knitting, I think it useful to contextualise, broadly, arguments around the gendering of creativity and the way that textile craft has been valued. While textile craft and knitting can take a variety of forms and have been experienced in many ways by different people over time, they are practices, which, above all, persist (Clarke, 2016; 2). It has been argued that the gendered history and nature of the craft explains its neglect in terms of academic, popular and critical engagement: “the iconography of women’s work is rarely given the serious consideration it deserves” (Parker, 1989; 12). Crafts such as sculpture in hard media such as bronze, steel, stone or glass tend to be valued more highly than work done in soft media, and fiber is particularly suspect because it bears a double prejudice: it

is dismissed as both “decorative” and “feminine” (Gordon, 2011; 243). Indeed, in terms of histories of creativity and creative value: “the art/craft hierarchy suggests that art made with thread and art made with paint are intrinsically unequal: that the former is artistically less significant. But the real differences between the two are in terms of where they are made and who makes them” (Parker, 1989; 5). Art historian Lucy Lippard (1995) echoes this, by suggesting that women’s creative expression has historically been relegated because of its relationship to function, utility and everydayness. For feminists’ then, amateur craft is a way of recognizing the enforced conditions of their own practice – amateurism is a middle ground through which women artists can articulate the difficulty of their position (Jefferies, 2011, Parker, 1989, Knott, 2015). Cultural geographer Catherine Nash (1994; 163) suggests, “knitting often connotes ideas of passivity, privacy and maternal care in clothing the family”. So, when used in feminist art, these connotations mean knitting can become subversive to these stereotypes: “a form of drawing that breaks down the distinction between art and craft, active and passive, which has devalued women’s cultural production” (ibid.).

Knitting, feminism and activism

Whilst it is important to sketch out the ways in which feminist art history has shaped academic thought on knitting, I want to turn now to engage more explicitly with knitting as an amateur craft and its relationship to the social movement of feminism. For Gschwandtner (2008; 278) knitting is a site, and it can and should be used as a form of broadcasting by feminists, just like the Internet, television, or any other public media. As I have discussed, feminist artists have used knitting in order to “transform something ordinary into something surprising, subversive and poignant” (Buszek, 2011; 13). At one time, amateur craft was a mostly private affair: “the exclusive domain of the wealthy, and more particularly, of aristocratic women, who spent their time in “accomplishments” such as quiltwork, embroidery, and decorative painting” (Adamson, 2007; 140). Second wave feminism viewed knitting as a sign of women’s oppression, as domestic tasks for which the labour is unseen, invisible and undervalued (Turney, 2009). Under third wave feminism knitting is seen as public and social activity – which can encompass as much or as little as the individual knitter wants (Turney, 2009).

So then, “women of any age but especially younger women in their twenties and thirties see knitting as an empowering hobby because it provides an opportunity to undertake something purely unpractical and inefficient. It provides a conceptual link and helps redefine the historical and contemporary significance of domesticity in society” (Myzelev, 2009; 148). Indeed, “craft has become the new cool, the new collectible: a rebellion against high-street branding and mall sameness alike, against the globalization of labour exploitation and consumer indifference” (Jefferies, 2011; 224). Myzelev (2009, 161) continues: “similar to other activities such as embroidering, crocheting, and breastfeeding, it [knitting] allows women and in some instances men to bring their private hobbies to public spaces and thus reformulate even if temporarily the function of public areas such as cafes, buses, and libraries.” Notably, these sorts of actions have been coined as “craftivism”: this term refers to knit and crochet graffiti, and collective knitting that signifies the merging of crafting and activism. These practices draw on the tactile and tactical in various capacities, intentionally eluding precise definition and enabling ‘craftivists’ to express their dissent and to trouble systems of power through their ever-changing approaches, locations, and tactics (Wallace, 2013). So perhaps, knitting is a feminist movement because it is increasingly concerned with issues of space, bodies and the binaries of public and private spheres and the fluidity of personal and political practices. For Wallace (2013) considering craftivism opens up possibilities of broader feminist engagement with mobilities – questioning gender, privilege, and power of who can move, and who feels comfortable to move, in and out of space with knitting.

At a more fundamental level, it has been argued that valuing the craft of knitting is a feminist act in itself because the denigration of knitting correlates directly with the denigration of a traditionally women-centered activity (Stoller, 2003). However, it has been discovered that there is much variation in the degree to which individual knitters and knitting communities engage with feminist politics. Kelly (2014; 142) found examples of individual knitters and knitting communities that are clearly not feminist and are largely apolitical and argues that scholars and others writing about knitting primarily as art and activism have been “overly optimistic” about the potential for knitting as a location for feminist politics (Kelly, 2014; 143). Indeed, clearly not all acts of knitting can or should be considered feminist in intent. These

concerns do not cancel out the potential for knitting to be used as a political tool by feminists, but they do require attention in order for feminist knitting practices to occur in a context of informed, critical self-reflexivity (Pentney, 2008). Ultimately, the contested meanings of knitting practices suggest limited and context specific possibilities for knitting as a feminist project (Kelly, 2014; 143). Perhaps then, it is best to consider a continuum of degrees of feminist knitting practices: online and ‘real life’ community building among knitters, mainstream advocacy and fundraising for social causes by knitters, and explicitly public protest through knitting and knitted items (Pentney, 2008). It is good to be reminded by Robertson (2011; 200) that “globalization and capitalism affect differently across lines of gender, and protest is not always a form of dissent open to all, [but] the work of activist knitting and other craft offers a rich promise across global north and global south”. So, at the least knitting does offer an alternative feminist politics of dissidence, and it is argued that it does so through “an affective and viral logic, which does not need to convince and dominate anybody, which does not have any adversary to destroy but which conveys warmth and joy” (Farinosi and Fortunati, 2013; 297).

Social knitting and making as connecting

Knitting *now* is celebrated for its public and social potential; knitting is a form of connecting. As Jessica Hemmings (2010; 9) puts it: “the resurgence of interest knitting enjoys today is not driven by the same motivations that shaped the popularity of knitting in the past. With our practical need for knitting long gone, this popular pastime now appears in unexpected guises with intentions and meanings that stray far outside the realm of the domestic and utilitarian”. This is echoed by Sandy Black (2012; 153) who suggests “knitting has been rediscovered by a new generation of aficionados for whom knitting was not a familiar activity in the home, but rather something fun and creative with fast and tangible results”. It is over the past two decades that knitting has been ‘revived’ as something that is fun, creative, social and connective. This is illustrated by the proliferation of knitting groups, notably referred to as ‘Stitch’n Bitch’⁷. Stitch’n Bitch is a collective term given to groups of young women who get together to knit, stitch and chat; such

⁷ The term was first used by Anne Macdonald (1980) in her account of the Social History of American Knitting, and is thought to have been used vernacularly during World War Two. It was most recently mobilized by Debbie Stoller (2003) who used the phrase for the ‘Stitch’n Bitch’ handbook that informed a new wave of knitters in the 2000’s.

groups, it is argued, may be a response to major political, social and technological changes of the twenty first century (Minahan and Cox, 2007; 5).

At a basic level knitting groups function as an opportunity for participants to learn new skills and get advice on how to fix mistakes from fellow enthusiasts (Stannard and Sanders, 2015). However, technologies have extended the boundaries of knitting as a craft by providing users with real and virtual forums to discuss, exchange, meet and take pleasure in shared meanings and understandings. So then, creative practices of such knitting are extended through activities around online representations of process and completed objects (Orton-Johnson, 2014; 319). In doing so, knitting provides a vehicle, through belonging to real time or virtual groups, for improving social contact and communication and for making friends (Riley *et al*, 2013). Of course, historical contextualisation of this practice is important; Sandy Black (2012; 104) reminds us that women historically have often 'knitted together': "being such as portable activity, hand-knitting contributed to community discourse where it was purposely carried out in groups or 'knitting circles' to while away long winter evenings and socialize when the outdoor work of the day was done". The emergence of *Stitch'n Bitch*, perhaps, reflects a contemporary wish by women for self-expression of creativity and social connection at a community level through leisure.

Narratives around the cultural and social potential of knitting groups sit within broader, growing contemporary debate about what it means to work with others – with the political and cultural ramifications this brings (Ravetz *et al*, 2013, Gauntlett, 2011, Adamson, 2007). Knitting appears to be the 'poster' craft for renewed interest in making and doing and sits at the forefront of these debates. Notably, David Gauntlett (2011; 435) has coined the term 'making is connecting': "making things shows us that we are powerful, creative agents – people who can really do things, things that other people can see, learn from, and enjoy. Making things is about transforming materials into something new, but it is also about transforming one's own sense of self". This is echoed by Fiona Hackney (2013; 187) who suggests "the great strength of amateur hobbyist practice is that it brings communities of interest together reflectively and reflexively through a shared love of "making" and in the context of everyday life. As such, it produces the means and conditions through

which alternative values and ways of living can be imagined and shared, and practical examples for change defined and materialised.” More conceptually it has been argued that collaboration through craft produces insights that are contingent and generative rather than transmitting pre-existing content (Ravetz *et al*, 2013; 1). So, knitting groups become sites of possibility (Gschwandtner, 2008). As Hallam and Ingold (2007; 1) explain, there is no script for social and cultural life; rather all practices are improvised, and in being improvised are generative, relational and temporal. So then, broadly and philosophically, knitting is connecting because it is generative of social relations: the contingency of material in the making reflects the temporalities of relations in process. Crafts like knitting, which are considered “different” yet culturally familiar activities, help to facilitate conversations (Greer, 2008; 55). However, more research is needed to explore the potential for craft textiles in culturally diverse groups, in relation to different craft activities, and how craft textiles or other craft activities can stimulate meaningful engagement and activity (Kenning, 2015; 63).

Wellbeing and knitting for health benefits

One particular narrative that runs throughout celebratory engagement with knitting is the opportunities it provides for wellbeing, self-care and its health benefits. For Minahan and Cox (2007; 8) knitting groups are best understood by focusing on how their material culture enhances social connectedness and wellbeing of women. Knit and crochet groups online and offline provide an improved sense of agency and self esteem; making in a shared environment reframes a solitary creative activity as meaningful in relation to feelings of personal and social well-being (Mayne, 2016). Knitting, like other lifestyle practices such as gardening and cooking, becomes newly significant as a means of creating or marking time as time for the self, outside of financial or familial responsibilities and duties (Parkins, 2004; 432). Parkins (2004; 433) continues, “knitting, with its connotations of pre-industrial domesticity, may seem to reinforce women’s locatedness in the private space of the home but the resignification of knitting as leisure, as a way of creating space and time for the self, may provide an effective means of being in, but not of, the domestic”. Riley *et al* (2013), in their extensive research on knitting for wellbeing, found that participants articulated the potential of knitting to induce feelings of calm and relaxation and to

raise mood; it contributed significantly to stress relief (Riley *et al*, 2013). For Kenning (2015; 62), in the context of increasingly de-institutionalised aged care and self-management of health and wellbeing, knitting provides a low cost, effective, efficient activity that can promote positive feelings and bring joy to those with illness – independently or within institutions. In this context then, engaging with craft for wellbeing becomes a social and economic imperative (Kenning 2015; 62). However, as Corkhill *et al* (2014; 50) explain, it is striking to note that the lone knitter is often absent from these conversations around knitting, wellbeing and positive health benefits. Depictions of knitting as a solitary pastime are often presented in negative terms: loneliness, isolation—even madness (Faiers, 2014). Grandmotherly figures are especially disempowered, and often the contemporary knitter who knits for fun, for leisure, for their health is opposed to a parallel version of the knitter, one more dependent on the devalued, gendered stereotype of the ‘grandma’ (Fields, 2014; 2). Moreover, whilst knitting is leisure for some, for many women throughout the world such work continues to be underpaid, undervalued and unsatisfying in the context of their health, wellbeing and social-economic position (Clarke, 2016, Robertson, 2011, Grovenheld, 2010, Dirix, 2014).

Knitting as alternative consumption

Proliferation of craft and focus on the hand-made, hand-knitted, hand-produced have occurred alongside academic interest with ‘slow movements’ more broadly, for example, slow food, slow cities, slow activism (see Andrews, 2008; Pink, 2009; Hayes-Conroy, 2010). These practices offer ‘alternative’ ways of participating in consumption practices. In an age of global travel and instant communication the temporality of knitting (a slower, mindful use of time) may be seen as a precarious attempt to escape the “tyranny of the moment” and shape a new subject (Parkins, 2004; 436). As Jefferies puts it (2011; 237) “the pleasure of making things and the products of human hand, whether individually fashioned or collectively produced as part of social activities, enhance qualities of life and communication beyond the mundane, the superficial and the corporate”. Indeed, handmaking then can be viewed as “a return to a different relationship between fashion and consumption in which we see our clothes as long term investment pieces that speak of durability, love, attachment, quality and craft” (Crewe, 2013; 202). Similarly, in a positive vein

fashion theorist Kate Fletcher (2008; 125) suggests: “the activity of friends knitting together is beautiful, compostable garments are beautiful, supporting a disadvantaged community with careful purchasing is beautiful. Relationships can be fostered by designing garments that encourage us to ask deep questions about our sense of place in the natural world”. So then, emphasis here is placed on slow production as opposed to rapid output, on personal expression against repetitive and specialized tasks, and on gift exchange versus mass production (Bratich and Brush, 2011; 235). Moreover, it is argued that the collaborative aspects of craft culture reappropriate the collective qualities of sweatshop labor, but without the exploitative discipline and hierarchical forms (Bratich and Brush, 2011; 235).

Bain (2016; 65) suggests that home dressmaking, knitting included, deserves to be examined for its politics, and should not be dismissed as a passive or retrograde nostalgia. This is echoed by Hall and Jayne (2015) who explain: “contemporary cultures and geographies of dressmaking are distinguishable from their historic, post-war counterpart, and that to simply denote current dressmaking practices as being a mere replication of the ‘make-do-and-mend’ mentality is to overlook that austerity today comes from a very different set of social, economic and political conditions to those that have come before”. In her research with amateur knitters Amy Twigger-Holroyd (2015; 3) found that knitters derive satisfaction from the interaction of body and materials, and the opportunity to create useful items, which will last, and the possibility of using their skills in knitting to extend the life, and creatively rework, existing garments (Twigger-Holroyd 2015; 3). However, Stannard and Sanders (2015; 110) found that knitters using craft as an alternative means of consumption perceived inequalities. They found that some young knitters felt the expense of their craft keenly and felt limited in their ability to make projects, afford higher quality materials that would last, whilst balancing responsibilities to themselves and others.

In summary then, geographers have yet to fully engage with knitting as an academic object of study. This thesis looks to develop that engagement and I have attempted here to introduce some of the histories, debates and contemporary empirical research on knitting from the disciplines of fashion, textiles, and craft theories. Running throughout this commentary has been the complex way that knitting both

empowers and disempowers congruently (see Price, 2015 for expansion), the ambivalent and messy relationship of knitting to social movements of feminism and politics of domesticity, and the markedly absent critical engagement of knitting beyond the rhetoric of its return, revival and contemporary popularity. Put simply, as others have argued, knitting never actually went away (Dirix, 2014, Newington, 2014, Black, 2012, Turney, 2009). Rather it has gained visibility and different politics, motivations and economics than it may have done historically. As Clarke (2016, 8) suggests, it is important not to ignore the nuance and histories of feminist engagement with craft and domesticity – a tension continues to be seen to exist between feminism and craft. What remains constant is the undervaluing of knitting which presents: “a democracy of objects and practices, so prolific, so mundane that it isn’t noticed, its taken for granted, its cultural stigma belies its complexities and skill – knitting is overlooked” (Turney, 2009; 5). As I conclude this section on knitted geographies, I turn now to review the literature on, and situate this craft within, geographies of creativity. More specifically, my focus is on geographies of vernacular or amateur creativity and the politics of with *whom*, *where* and *when* creativity resides.

Geographies of Creativity

Amateur, vernacular, common creativity?

As part of the geographical turn towards the potential of the everyday and ‘mundane’, academics have begun to engage with ordinary spaces and their creativities: ‘in thinking through gaps and cracks in making sense of the world there is fertile ground for considering how performances in the mundane can extend, or leak, across other values, relations, and signification through which individuals may act, feel, think and adjust’ (Crouch, 2003; 1958). Latterly, geographers have become attuned to the creative potential of everyday activities, which are usefully grouped under the banner of ‘vernacular creativity’ (Edensor *et al*, 2009; 1). This work builds upon the same term coined by Jean Burgess (2006; 6) as: “a heuristic device, to describe and illuminate creative practices that emerge from highly particular and non-elite social contexts and communicative conventions”. Tim Edensor *et al* (2009; 1) build upon this definition by suggesting: “an understanding of vernacular and

everyday landscapes of creativity honours the non-economic values and outcomes produced by alternative, marginal and quotidian creative practices”. So then, within geography we see engagements with creative practices and people beyond those recognized formally by the economy: amateurs, tinkerers, hobbyists, makers, DIYers etc. Crafts’ historian Glenn Adamson (2007; 140) suggests, “in theory, hobbyists are beneath the notice of the expert. In practice, though, the line between the two is often a blurred one”. The notion of ‘amateur’ then should not degrade the level of skill and expertise held by somebody engaged in creative practices that are in some way vernacular or everyday. Indeed, for Richard Sennett (2008; 115) “the middle ground of work between amateur and professional is craftsmanship”. In work led by Helen Nicholson *et al* (2016; 4) on the spaces of amateur dramatics and local theatre it was found that “amateurism has become a by-word for poor-quality work, and a recurring theme in interviews is that amateurs resent the negative associations of the word”. Indeed, “some people are offended by the word ‘amateur’, preferring ‘local’ or ‘community’ as a prefix” (Nicholson *et al*, 2016; 3). So then, creative practices that are in some way vernacular or amateur should not be conflated with notions of unskilled work; rather, amateur and vernacular creativities bring together people, practices and spaces that support, give meaning and power to forms of everyday creativity beyond those formally recognised as part of ‘the creative economy’.

One effect of mass academic work and policy making about creativity has been to shape a particular set of assumptions about where creativity is located, where it is likely to emerge and why. As Gibson *et al* (2012; 3) suggest: “researchers have looked for creativity in fairly obvious places (big cities, cities making overt attempts to reinvent themselves through culture, creativity and cosmopolitanism); have found it there; and have theorised about cities, creative industries and urban transformation as if their subsequent models or logic were universally relevant everywhere”. The result has been not only a neglect of creativity that is in some way vernacular, mundane, or amateur but also a geographical neglect of spaces beyond the urban – suburban towns, rural spaces, and ordinary places (Bell and Jayne, 2008). In considering the ‘where’ of creativity, vernacular creativities encourage us to look at the small scale: small or unexpected spaces and places such as garages, sheds, cafes, community centres, gardens, and homes (Gibson and Warren, 2011;

Jupp, 2007; Crouch, 2007; Gregson *et al*, 2007). More than this: “besides the ordinary community centres and parish halls within which hobbies and pastimes are enjoyed, back alleys, house facades, allotments, rubbish tips, cafes, and cyberspace are mundane spaces in which creativity can be pursued” (Edensor *et al*, 2009; 14). So then, engaging with vernacular creativity asks three particular things of geographers that have been marginalised by contemporary engagement with creative practices. Firstly, a consideration of *what* ‘counts’ as creativity: and an inclusion of amateur, everyday, vernacular practices. Secondly, an exploration of *where* this creativity takes places: and a view beyond the urban, to suburban spaces but also sites such as the home, garages, community centres etc. Thirdly, *who* gets to be creative and how might identities be produced and shaped by creative practices: “these overlooked sites are often imprinted, shape, and produce class, gendered and ethnic identities upon the landscape that resonate with affective and expressive values and that articulate conviviality and social solidarities” (Edensor *et al*, 2009; 14).

Home, sheds, garages as creative space

In the context of vernacular creativities, the home and domestic space is highlighted as a particular site of doing, making, and being creative in various ways. Academic research on the material culture of homes and creativity has historically focused on interior design, negotiation of objects and things therein, and their relationship to identities, families and place (Gregson, 2007, Miller, 2009, Blunt and Dowling, 2004). The notion of homemaking is understood as the stitching of social relationships, identities, and materialities into a place called home, a “pattern of regular doings, furnishings and appurtenances” which fashion and reproduce the domestic (Baxter and Brickell, 2015; 134).

Alongside these debates has been research on DIY, home repairs, and small acts of craft (Watson, 2007; Watson, 2008; Gregson *et al*, 2009). The processes through which home is understood to be made are material (DIY, cooking, cleaning, decorating); social (familiar care, support and love); cultural (migration, histories, mobilities); and economic (rental markets, mortgages, loans for home improvement). These are, of course, an idealistic notion of home, but they are pervasive in the assumption that these are the processes through which a home – as

an ideal product – is *made*. Historically, feminist geographers have sought to interrogate these simplistic assumptions, and the broader ‘home as haven’ thesis (Sibley, 2002, Brickell, 2011). Rather, homemaking is now understood through its connections to, and interactions with, the “outside world” with an understanding of the complexity of home as domicile, as a nexus of domestic processes, and as intimate and private space that is both made and *unmade* (Baxter and Brickell, 2015; 136). Latterly, feminist geographers have begun to engage with gender, skill, and *homemaking* through a focus on the material production, maintenance and repair of home: “materials allow, demand or encourage very different amounts of maintenance and renovation, giving homeowners quite different opportunities to work on the fabric of their homes” (Cox, 2016; 66). These practices have long been subject to gendered division: “building a house involves multiple overlapping processes: the design (often formally termed architecture), the construction or building, the finishing decoration and the occupation. Historically men have been associated with the structure and women with the interior and decoration of houses” (ibid).

Nicky Gregson (2008) suggests that things’ enduringness in the home is critical to the narration of self: acts of collecting, accommodating, ridding are not only creative but also fundamental to the enduringness of ‘home’ as a site and the act of homemaking. Stalp (2007) argues that craft fabric collections (in the quilting context) and the space they take up reveal the primacy of women’s identities as crafters in the home. Women in particular, she argues, experience anxiety surrounding acquiring, hoarding, and hiding their craft collections (Stalp, 2006; 106). One space with, or of, the home that has gained significant attention from geographers is the garden (Bhatti *et al*, 2000, Bhatti *et al*, 2009, Crouch, 2009, Longhurst, 2006, Hitchings, 2003). Indeed, the domestic garden is an enchanting landscape of everyday life and being in the garden involves a certain kind of sensibility: a ‘doing’ through haptic perception, a caring through cultivating (Bhatti *et al*, 2009; 73). Other domestic spaces are also now garnering attention as sites of vernacular creativity and making. Warren and Gibson (2011), for example, have examined domestic garages as sites of vernacular creativity and custom car design for working class men in an Australian city: “in a city far from being entirely deindustrialised, custom-car design emerges as local, everyday, vernacular, and

working-class creativity. Participants accessed professional and personal networks to fabricate extreme show customs and project hobby-based cars” (Warren and Gibson, 2011; 2717).

Creative class?

Leisure is gendered in both its expectations and its experiences (Tivers, 2004); it works to operate and reinforce gendered identities that may be oppressive for both men and women. Famously, Rosemary Deem (1986; 149) argued that “women’s leisure displays many qualities (...) solidarity with their own sex but in a spirit of friendship and companionship rather than competition or status struggled, an emphasis on caring and on co-operation, a lack of aggression and selfishness, enjoyment of everyday things and happenings, an emphasis on the creative and aesthetic values of life”. The hobbies, the skills, the tastes and the creative practices of vernacular creativity may both shape and be shaped across axes of gender and class: “the implication persists that differently positioned social groups lack the necessary creative skills, cultural tastes and competencies to effectively operate within the creative economy, and even more, that there is a creative class – and therefore other classes that are not creative” (Edensor *et al*, 2009; 6). Often, it is middle class selves that are centred and placed in perpetual motion, always becoming rather than being. To be someone who is creative is often a declaration of worth, investment and reflexive spatialized potential, reliant on positioning others as lacking: as static, out of place (Taylor, 2011; 2). So then, leisure or creativity associated with working class identities may be viewed as unprogressive or lacking, within the context of contemporary society and fashion.

For example, the characteristics of excess attributed to Christmas light displayers in North West England contrast with the class-oriented values of their critics, who imply that they, conversely, carry out responsible, modest, skilful and tasteful modes of consumption. Some Christmas lights appear to be deemed to be excessive and irredeemable, an expression of a classed essence rather than witty and cool. They are commonly regarded as an immodest spectacle, excessive aesthetically, a waste of money by poor, inept consumers (Edensor and Millington, 2009; 110). However, those who display Christmas lights view them as a site of conviviality and

community spirited creative practice. These tensions between aesthetics, taste and creativity are echoed in research on creative car culture: “while there were divergent modes of production, creative priorities, and motivations, respondents shared an overwhelming sense of pride, enthusiasm, and commitment to their cars, with the scene’s commercial dimensions deeply enmeshed in local social networks of friends, family, and acquaintances. What might be an unwelcome, loud, flashy car to one person is for another an entrée to a world of design and specialisation, a vibrant, resourceful, and organised aspect of industrial city life” (Warren and Gibson, 2011; 2717).

Feeling the flow: doing creativity and creative bodies

For Sennett (2008; 10) “all skills, even the most abstract, begin as bodily practices”. Geographers have come to appreciate the value of the body, bodily practices and embodied doings as key to the production of subjects, spaces and geographical knowledge, and they have embraced a range of practices that enable the exploration of these ideas. One of the driving forces behind geographical concerns with making and craft practices has been a wider disciplinary concern with questions of the body and practice: “across the full spectrum of ‘making cultures’ are suggestions of sensibilities and dispositions that are centred on a deep and considered relationship with materials” (Carr and Gibson, 2015; 3). As such there is much geographers can learn by thinking through existing literature by sociologists, anthropologists and others that explore the phenomenological and embodied practice of making and crafting (O’Connor, 2007, Hockey and Allen-Collison, 2009, Ash, 2013, Atkinson, 2013, Holmes, 2014, Ocejo, 2014). Pioneered by phenomenologists and feminist geographers, and growing to encompass non-representational theory, geographical engagement with the body combines phenomenological engagements with being in the world with concerns around skill and habit, intersections of cognition and the affective or non-cognitive, and appreciations of the messy-fleshy nature of our bodies (Ash and Simpson, 2014, McCormack, 2013, Pickerill, 2014, Waitt and Stanes, 2015).

For Crouch (2003; 1958) as vernacular creative practices occur: “performativities collide and these knots contain the potential for numerous tensions that may or may

not be negotiated, coped with, or realised in becoming. The unexpected may emerge during and between the times spent in tasking”. Yet despite this, geographers, in understanding the process of becoming skilled and tasking, have devoted little attention to bodies. This is surprising because learning not only shapes the muscles, tissues and attitudes of individual bodies, but also positions those bodies within wider contexts, designating them as skilled or unskilled and shaping professional identities and livelihoods (Lea, 2009; 465). In becoming skilled and through tasks of making, mending, tinkering and doing, more than material products are made; identities are produced through embodied practices. For David Paton (2013; 1086): “the mundane reality of making, and thus of labour, is resolutely political, a geographical imperative, and a critical means of operating a meaningful relationship with this material life”.

On the whole, geographers have focused on embodied doing of more formal ‘craft’ labour – rather than the embodied experience of the amateur maker. A notable example is Andrew Warren (2016; 52) and his research on gender and surfboard making: “when men perform work, they constantly draw from embodied skills. Male workers in the surfboard industry possess unique haptic knowledge. These bodily sensations and responses arise through making customised products”. Elaborating further, Warren (2016; 52) explains, “for surfboard-makers, the emotions – how they feel about their work or board design – are the connective tissue between their bodies and high-quality craftwork”. Thurnell-Read (2014; 8) echoes this experience in his research on workers at craft breweries, suggesting: “while brewers did, to some extent, offer stock narratives of their entry into the trade, where their accounts became most energetic was when talking about the brewery as a space with an almost magical coming together of affective attachments, embodied processes and tangible sensory stimuli”. A focus on embodied practice and labour opens up less obvious forms of labour to become understood as craftwork, or craft production, by engaging with the creativity of work that stems from material knowledge, sensory engagement and the use of the body in creative practice. So then, for Richard Ocejo cocktail making in New York becomes craft production: “particular ingredients, craft techniques, established recipes, and improvisation are all practices that cocktail bartenders engage in and use to transform bartending from a service job with manual labour into creative work that

requires command over the mental, material, and physical aspects of the work” (Ocejo, 2010; 182).

Thus, in their discussions with making practices, geographers have illustrated how craftspeople emphasise their embodied practices. This in turn has led to an emphasis on the viscosity of the making practices they have engaged with. For example, for Warren and Gibson the way surfers frame their ‘broken bodies’ in a material sense (illness or fatigue from over-working) is bound up in cultures of masculinity, and the body being ‘strong’ and ‘broken’ when unable to perform as it should in gendered terms (Warren, 2015, Warren and Gibson, 2014). For Cox (2015; 1), “these material-people conversations are historically and geographically situated and skills are the medium through which materials and identities relate”. In her research on DIY skills, men and the home in New Zealand, Cox (2015; 10) argues “DIY skills are gendered, so having (or not) the competence to do DIY can become part of a gendered sense of identity”. David Paton (2013) reflects the intensity of labour and working with stone by quoting a fellow quarry worker: “Fuck the granite! I am tired, I have a few more notches in my skin, a few more muscle fibres are anchored to bone, a few more tonnes of granite have passed through the filter of materiality and emerged forever unchanged”. In short, there seems to be a conflation between materials, practice and gender that produces ‘strong masculine bodies’ because they work with particularly ‘hard’ materials, such as stone and wood.

However, Pickerill (2015) has countered these arguments, with an ethnography of female eco-builders: “the assumption that only male bodies are strong, and that only strong bodies can build (reifying the male body), has been challenged by, mostly female, eco-builders who have sought to illustrate the complexity of both building and bodies. Assumptions around ‘strong bodies’ have created a space of opportunity for female eco-builders to prove how embodiment is central to understanding building practice” (Pickerill, 2015; 909). As Bissell (2008; 1698) has argued, “slower bodies or stilled bodies are depicted as having fewer agencies and are therefore subsumed within the projects, more often than not, of more agile agentive bodies”. There is a need, I argue, to focus on slower, stilled forms of craft, embodied experiences, and the types of bodies that become gendered through

making. The softness of wool pursued in this thesis is a particularly fertile basis for such work.

Material Geographies

Material geographies: fibres, vibrancy, and transience

Increasingly, as part of a commitment to expanding social life to more-than-human agencies, geographers are engaging with *materials* in explorations of how they shape bodies, spaces and practice (Whatmore, 2006, Panelli, 2009). They have done so over a number of environmental and elemental registers: exploring, for example, water or air (Gibbs, 2009, Adey, 2015, Englemann, 2015). Often shaped by vitalist concerns with material ‘vibrancy’ (Bennett, 2010), through these engagements we find ways that materials are agentic, affective, creative and political. These material geographies recognise the Political is shaped by material politics. There has also been a more specific body of work engaging with materials in studies of consumption and commodities. Such work speaks back to the wider environmental and political commitments of material vibrancy and thinking through the challenges of the anthropocene, for example through a focus on repair and mending, in which “the ability to work with materials, and to make, repair or repurpose physical things, are vital skills, for a future where such resources become increasingly limited and extreme events related to a shifting climate are more common” (Carr and Gibson, 2015; 7).

Geographers have always been interested in people’s relationships to material things and their particular material qualities (see Crang, 2014). Usually, these material properties (not just materiality) have been brought to the fore by geographical engagements with production, consumption and movements along the commodity chain; at all stages the material of commodities is *affective*. In the exemplary ‘Follow the Thing’ study of papaya (Cook *et al*, 2004), the narrative begins by describing the immediacy of papaya decay in the farmer’s ‘picking’ process; it ends by reflecting on the material properties of papaya harnessed for other commodities (including shrink resistant woollen fabric; p.662). The role of material properties (texture, taste, feel) in geographies of consumption has been articulated across commodities. Clothing is

purchased in relation to embodied experience with the material (texture) (Woodward, 2005, Colls, 2005, Woodward and Miller, 2012, Miller, 2009); food is purchased in relation to viscerality, tactility, and materiality (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010, Longhurst, 2012). Material properties of commodities then, are best articulated under ‘texture’ and ‘taste’. Both terms ‘*get at*’ the tension, multiplicity of meaning, meaning making and material experience of consumer culture, shaped by: touch, style, aesthetics, viscerality, and intimacy. It is at these tensions that boundaries between consumption and production are distinctly fuzzy therefore, by implication, “consuming, making and doing go hand in hand” (Watson, 2008; 9).

For Ingold (2008) making is a process of recognising material properties: in doing so, we recognise the role of materials in the production of *worlds*. This ontological thinking disrupts the stability of objects. Instead, “the object is but a temporary moment in an endless process of assembling materials, a partial stabilization and a fragile holding together that is always inexorably becoming something else, somewhere else” (Crang *et al*, 2012; 73). Ingold (2008; 7) suggests that: “the forms of things are not imposed from without upon an inert substrate of matter, but are continually generated and dissolved within the fluxes of materials across the interface between substances and the medium that surrounds them. Thus things are active not because they are imbued with agency but because of ways in which they are caught up in these currents of the lifeworld. The properties of materials, then, are not fixed attributes of matter but are processual and relational. To describe these properties means telling their stories.” Within the discipline we see a turn to what Harriet Hawkins (2013; 65) has referred to as “creative geographies foregrounding of the on-going material making and shaping of the world”. In this section now I review geographies of touch, materiality and focus on textiles and clothing and the particular material sensations they articulate. In doing so, I address the neglect of wool and fabrics that knitted geographies speaks to.

Making material relationships

Makers, in relationship to materials, readily articulate the notion of tactility, texture, touch, and bodily intuition that acknowledges the role of materials and materiality in

co-producing experience. For Hawkins (2013; 63) examining the ‘making’ of art sees artistic practices and materialities come together with critical effect, she refers to: “artistic use of natural materials and processes including water’s ebb and flow, land’s gradual or seismic shifts, the creep of soil, the decay of organic material, and the remnants of geological and glaciological processes”. Referring to craft and the politics of making sustainable fashion, Louise Crewe (2013, 12) calls for “a revaluing of materials and materiality in the determination of quality and for appreciative consumption of products that we love, that engage our hearts and minds as well as our bodies and flesh” (Crewe, 2013, 212). Hand-made products speak viscerally to materials and materiality of the crafted object, maker and wearer, or consumer. For example, Chris Gibson (2014; 9) in his research on making leather cowboy boots explains the process as “grizzly contact with an assortment of nonhuman animals, feeling their dead skins, smelling them, and wearing them”. He continues that animal traces are felt viscerally and are “responsible for the textural, sensual responses elicited both among bootmakers who manipulate skins into boots, and in tourists by touching, feeling and smelling hides” (Gibson, 2014; 9). Helen Holmes (2014; 106) has researched hairdressing as a craft practice and speaks of hair’s “constant material qualities, which are not easily changed and instead can resist and repel the fashions we try to make hair conform to”. Further to this, Holmes (2014; 106) states, “the materiality of hair and how hair is made materially fashionable extends far beyond the material of hair alone. Rather, the materiality of hair fashion encompasses bodies through their labour to create fashionable hair, taming the ever-changing palimpsest, or attempting to make hair conform to a new fashion” (Holmes, 2014; 106). Similarly, Patchette (2015, 14) and her work on taxidermy describes how “the taxidermist is obliged to ‘follow the material’ and rhythmically respond to and negotiate its affordances while stitching back and forth across the cut”. In examining geographies of making material transformation comes to the fore: this is in relation to the human experience of ‘making’ and material craft processes but also we are reminded “material properties are not fixed. Rather, they change in relation to states, the interventions made, and the transformations wrought” (Gregson *et al*, 2013; 1080).

Gregson *et al* (2013; 1081) refer here to research on the micropractices of “cutting, ripping, tearing, reducing, shredding, compressing, wrapping, moving, sorting,

separating, and so on” through which asbestos is reanimated in materials and therefore harmful to human life. In short, we are reminded that not material making processes are satisfying, or even healthy. This sentiment is explored by Lucy Norris and her research on textile recycling and shoddy factory workers; to transform a mounting of clothing into a pile of rags involves “profound sensory intimacy with each and every garment, a perceptual encounter with its invasive materiality” (Norris, 2012; 41). Indeed: “working on worn clothing involves engaging with their whole bodies, smelling its overwhelming odours released into the dusty warmth, scanning its colours and patterns to assess its value, feeling the prickly wool and plastic acrylic, slippery linings and ridges of seams between practised hands” (Norris, 2012; 36). In the spirit of feminist geography and “politics that work toward the production of knowledge with a feeling of justice” (Wright, 2010; 105) it is important to understand the unequal experiences of ‘making’ and material experiences that empower and disempower congruently and are felt differently cross lines of gender, class and race.

Geographies of clothing and textiles

As I argued earlier, I am concerned about the academic neglect of geographies that are in some way soft, or slow, and studies of fashion and textiles have been similar neglected. This is despite, as Beverly Gordon (2011; 146) notes, “everyone, in every culture, uses and understands cloth; everyone has kinetic experience with fabric and its comforting properties” indeed, “the very qualities of textiles, such as their ability to absorb, enfold and contain, expand, and tie together, make them important symbols” (ibid). As Angela McRobbie (1998; 21) has noted, fashion and textile production technology has not developed too far beyond sewing machines and electronic cutters, these factors combined with its image as “low pay, seasonal and feminised field of production mean that it has never attracted the attention of the politicians or economists in anything like other industrial sectors have”. As Crewe (2011; 2093) explains “fashion is suggestive of transience, pliability, ephemerality, and superficiality (Hollander, 1975). It uses soft, sometimes fragile, materials. It is characterised by rapid temporality, neophilia, and operates on the smallest, closest in scales of the body”. Geographer Sophie Woodward (2002; 345) has argued “with a few notable exceptions, clothing remains a ghostly presence, coming to appear

immaterial by the very lack of engagement with the physicality of clothing itself'. However, "fashion and dress are amenable to and benefit from an intimate understanding of the material form" (Woodward, 2002; 352) and "the crucial importance of the materiality of garments, specifically, how the material qualities of garments impact upon how garments are able to externalize particular cultural categories of identities" (Woodward and Fisher, 2014; 4). Put simply, the *materials* of fashion and the *making* of clothing matter but have often been neglected and this fits into a wider neglect of fashion and textiles often explainable through their feminised, gendered, and bodily concerns.

This partiality has been rectified in part by extensive studies of particular materials and their role in shaping fashion. For example, a recent investigation into global denim, which places the materiality of denim, at the centre of understanding. Woodward and Miller (2011; 10) explain: "we cannot hope to understand the history, symbolism and contemporary significance of denim without paying attention to the nature of denim as textile". The social, political, economic and cultural development of denim is resolutely a story of its material development and an important part of clothing and textile history. Miller and Woodward (2011; 2) noted that "the less people wore particular genres of clothing, the more those were the clothes that seemed to be written about". Put simply, there is a concern that more everyday, vernacular, of folk fashions are neglected, yet, wearing 'comfortable' clothing in public spaces – pyjamas, sportswear and other clothing most often thought as only being acceptable to wear 'at home' – is a feature of urban life around the world (Jayne and Ferencuhova, 2015; 335).

Chitrakorn (2015; 309) suggests "wool has always been such an integral part of British History – from industrial revolution to contemporary knitting festivals and events". Yet, there is little sociological engagement with wool, fibres, yarn, and knitted fabric. Engaging more explicably with fibre such as wool through making, and maker cultures, allows wider geographical investigations of the politics and spaces of materials "that become transformed in so many ways that it contributes to their mobility, malleability and invisibility" (Head et al, 2009; 2). For example, Hebrok *et al*, (2014; 68) have stated, "the itchiness' of wool comes not just from a material property, but is also an embodied experience of a particular wearer, arising

from properties of wool and our perceptions of these properties through material and embodied experiences.”

In Summary: towards feminist geographies of making

In this chapter I have sketched out contemporary geographical engagement with making, making things, and makers (Carr and Gibson, 2015; Warren and Gibson, 2014; Paton, 2013). In doing so, geographers are reconsidering questions of making and makers by questioning making as more than the simply human assertion of form onto static material. Making is, rather, a *co-production* that sees a human maker interacting with, and being shaped by, the animate matter being worked with. This builds upon broadly; geographical concerns with concepts such as embodiment, emotional, materialities and creativity. In this chapter I have brought together three substantive areas of research than I wish to advance in the thesis. These research areas are: academic study of knitting, geographical engagement with creativity and creative practices, and material geographies with explorations of matter, materiality and material processes.

Firstly, I have explored knitting as a focus of academic study bringing together research from art history, fashion and textiles and women’s studies. I have argued that on the whole, geographers have neglected knitting and textile production as an object of academic study and this can be explained by the gendered nature of knitting as a creative practice. I charted the relationship between knitting and feminism and concluded that more nuance in academic and empirical investigations into the potential of knitting as feminist practice and ways that knitting may be understood through feminist ethics. This discussion led me to review my second substantive area of research on the geographies of creativity and more particularly, creativity that is considered in some way amateur or vernacular. In this section I drew attention to where this creativity takes place: at home, community centres, in garages, and gardens and ‘making’ activities that take place here. I echoed Edensor *et al* (2009; 14) assertion that, “these overlooked sites are often imprinted, shape, and produce class, gendered and ethic identities upon the landscape that resonate with affective and expressive values and that articulate conviviality and social solidarities”. Participating in creative practice requires embodied labour, skill and

emotion and I have suggested that often slower, softer ways of being in the world, have been neglected for harder, vigorous forms of embodied experience and making things. Finally, I sketched out academic engagement with material geographies.

Feminist scholarship provides important insights into uneven power relations and gendered contexts. Running throughout each of these sections have been feminist geographical concerns with women's histories, women's leisure, gendered experiences, bodies and bodily performances, participation, creative value and on-going concerns about inequalities of access to leisure, creative labour as hobby, and material experiences. These are issues I have articulated more broadly under the 'textures' as introduced in chapter one and through Figure 1.1. These particular concerns, I would like to argue, develop 'geographies of making' towards a 'feminist geographies of making' by encouraging engagement with the politics of production. In doing so, it makes spaces of slower, quieter, and perhaps more human ways of consuming and being in the world. But, as a feminist geographer, I am concerned with for whom are these experiences for? How are bodies gendered through these experiences? What are the spatial inequalities of 'making'? How can making provide a viable means of alternative activism? I do so through the academic study of knitting, a topic that has been neglected by geography so far, as I have argued, as part of its gendered histories, geographies and spaces. Across chapter three now, I explain how I researched knitting and sketch how I achieved this methodologically.

Chapter Three

Researching: textile, participation, and skills

In this chapter I discuss my methodological approach of ‘knitted geographies’ – an approach that involved collecting, making and stitching together stories of knitters, knitting events and knitting projects that took place from January 2012 to January 2014. I employed an ethnographic orientation, in that during this period I participated in, engaged with, and interviewed about knitters’ lived experience, exploring “its full sensuality – the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations” that brought it to life (Herbert, 2000; 552). In attending festivals, knitting groups and events, and in interviewing crafters, artists and yarnbombers, I developed my research field through the “skein of relations and cultural constructions that tie it together” (Herbert, 2000; 552). I sought, like any other knitter, to work with rather than simply on my materials; in other words, I pursued the research with a participatory ethos, drawing on wider bodies of thought on feminist participatory research (Askins and Pain 2012; Kindon, 2003).

My focus on knitting as a research topic reflects a wider concern with people’s relationships to things (see Miller, 2009), stories about practices of material culture (Gregson, 2008; Crewe and Gregson, 2003) and the importance of ‘materials’ and ‘materiality’ in shaping these connections and explorations of sensoriality, tactility and more-than-human relationships (Bennett, 2001). Throughout this chapter, and the thesis more broadly, a concern with researching material relationships and expanded relations between social and more-than-human ‘matter’ has shaped my research. However, as Woodward (2015; 3) has noted, so far: “there has been very little methodological engagement with how qualitative methods might help us to understand materials and their properties, even as social scientists now argue for their centrality in the reproduction and breaking of social and material relations”. This chapter looks to further that engagement.

The chapter provides the reader with a range of information on: what research was undertaken, with whom and where; the methods deployed; the social relationships implicated in these methods and practices; and the wider methodological insights and arguments that shaped the work. To that end, the narrative progresses through

two main sections. In the first, I focus on the research process and how the ‘field’ in my ‘fieldwork’ was knitted together. Here I consider: my use of online research and social media; participant observation in identifiable knitting spaces and with knitting groups; the geographic locations of the research, and my recruitment of knitters who were not directly involved in knitting groups or events; and generally how the research process was one of collecting and connecting diverse stories and materials. In the second part of the chapter I focus more directly on the methods appropriate for researching knitting and as deployed in my own work. Here: I start by drawing out the value of conversational methods based on talk and testimony; then I consider the recent clarion calls for research on making and makers to involve direct craft experience and the development of expertise, arguing that these are complicated in the context of an ‘amateur creativity’; and finally I detail my use of photographic documentation.

Knitting the research together: the research process

Fostered by long traditions of anthropological ethnography, geographical scholarship and wider cultures of ‘field science’, there is often an assumption that empirical research happens in a particular, bounded place, distanced in some way from the academy. Fieldwork carries with it particular imaginations of the ‘field’ (Crang, 2003). Post-colonial and other critiques of ethnographic knowledge challenged such imaginations, portraying the field in more relational and mobile terms (Clifford, 1997). In my own research, I undertook empirical studies in a number of specific places and sites, and the specificities of those sites mattered. But, this fieldwork was not contained in one bounded, geographical field. The ‘field’ in my research was and is a space, or more properly spaces, that I and others knitted together. In this section of the chapter, I want to reflect on that knitting process. I start with my initial journeys into knitting spaces and mappings of a knitting scene, starting with my use of online networks and social media.

Following threads online

I began to write my proposal for this research in November 2010. At the time, social media platforms such as Twitter were becoming increasingly integrated into

everyday, academic life (see Kitchin *et al*, 2013 for expansion). I had had a personal Twitter profile since 2009, but as it became more important to my research it became less about what I had eaten that day, and more about sharing journal articles, press, and information on events etc. In order to keep 'in the loop' with various knitters, yarnbombers and artists I 'followed' various people on Twitter; I followed blogs and 'liked' Facebook pages. On the whole, this was an organic process, rather than systematic. Yet, it meant that each time I logged into Twitter I felt I was accessing a community 'at my fingertips'. As Orton-Johnson (2014; 319) puts it: "social networking sites in particular provide a space for knitters to produce and consume their leisure experience in new and profoundly mediated ways that fragment and augment traditional practices of knitting at the same time as investing them with new forms of social meaning, engagement and connectivity". I became part of that online knitting space.

Whilst this research acknowledges, and implicitly considers, the complex co-production of online and offline spaces of knitting; it is not a contextual analysis of blog and social media more broadly. Rather, I want to reflect on how I used social media as form of ethnographic access to a particular world. Indeed, twitter did allow me to find out about events I would not have otherwise, but I also participated in these events by joining in on hashtags. I felt able to play an active part of that community through social media engagement: retweets, favourites, posting links to news articles or blogs I had read. Before I had even begun to meet participants at events, or before I interviewed people, I felt like I had constructed a good idea of 'the scene'; not only that, but I felt part of it too. As Kitchin *et al* (2013; 56) puts it, social media "enables geographers to engage in timely conversation and debate with the public on unfolding issues, and provides new avenues to connect with older forms of broadcast media". In terms of crude statistics, my Twitter account involved over 4,500 tweets, with c. 850 followers and c. 975 people I was following. As well as my Twitter account I also launched and maintained a personal research blog, which in turn was connected into my Twitter presence.

However, Pickerill (2013) has cautioned overstating the participatory and public potential of social media. Like other technological spaces, it very quickly can become exclusionary, or curated in particular ways that no longer reflect the initial

freedom it inspired. I think this could be said for my research. On a good day, I felt that by posting tweets on both geography and knitting I was allowing followers (who may, or may not have been interested) to find out more about my research and me. This, on occasion, actually saved time during interviews – participants had been able to ‘look me up’ and find out more about me at their leisure. I seemed less ‘a disembodied, academic researcher’ and more human and personable (maybe it did help that I still posted the odd tweet on what I had had for tea that day). On a bad day, I began to feel pressured to be active; it became a burden and I sometimes felt like I could never ‘leave the field’ – it was always on my phone or my laptop. More than this, I still felt on-going responsibility to my participants who were on Twitter. I felt I had to continue supporting them with retweets and favourites. Although, it could be said that social media can offer only distanced support, I think that would do an injustice to the embodied experience and time that goes into maintaining social media as a researcher. On top of this, the ephemerality of Twitter began to feel unmanageable; each day seemed to offer new events I felt I had to go to. The field kept growing; the field kept coming at me. As a result, I began to withdraw from social media as I ‘wrote up’ my research in an online mimicry of the classic ethnographic departure from the field prior to dissemination and publication.

Overall, I would suggest that my use of Twitter, and my more general use of social media presence within my research methodology, was important for two reasons. Firstly, it allowed me to find events and groups to attend, and to find out more about particular figures (e.g. yarnbombers; recognised knitters) within the knitting scene that was emergent online during my work. It also allowed them to find out more about my work through my blog and tweets. Secondly, it allowed me to be part of a particular community in a way that I felt was useful – I could use my twitter feed to promote events and exhibitions; on occasion I blogged to help support events (see www.knittedgeographies.wordpress.com). As Head *et al* (2013; 90) have suggested, “social media has the capacity to generate new forms of collegiality, through everyday practices and interactions (...) social media is a space in which to enact prosaic forms of solidarity.” On reflection, my social media practice was indeed an important part of the on-going participatory ethics that shaped my research. More generally, I would argue that geographers are still yet to

fully engage with social media's potential as a methodology of participation, rather than a tool for dissemination, academic networking and publicity.

The knitty-gritty

As I have introduced, I used Twitter to find out about various knitting festivals and events that I would then attend in person. In classic ethnographic style, during these events I would participate in activities, conduct ethnographic interviews, take photos and produce scratch notes which I would then write through as fieldnotes afterwards (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In total, I attended around forty knitting events across London and to a much lesser degree, in Manchester. These ranged from knitting events, to exhibition and book launches – everything from 'knit-a-neuron', an exhibition on 'visible mending', to 'a knitted disco'.



Figure 3.1: Knitted Disco, The Great Eastern Bear Gallery. Author's own.

Attending these events gave me an overall feel of what was self-identified as ‘the knitting scene’. I would see familiar faces, experience similar rituals and routines, and I began to learn what to ‘expect’ from these events. Eventually, I began to focus primarily on around four main festivals (The Knitting and Stitch Show, Unravel, Spitalfield’s City Farm Wool, and Fayre Wool House). I attended these events each year for three years, each festival occupying one weekend on each occasion. These events feature especially in Chapter Four.

Otherwise, over the course of my empirical research I attended various knitting groups to get a *‘feel’* for them. These groups varied from weekly knitting groups that took place in shops, or cafes; along with knitting groups that were formed around the production of a project. The research presented in subsequent chapters focuses largely on four main groups, with whom I spent the most time. Firstly, a group I have called ‘Hammerknit’ (this is a pseudonym), which took place weekly in a café on my local high street in Hammersmith, West London. I attended this knitting group on and off for over two years; in total I attended just over forty meetings. I will say more about this group in Chapter Five, but it included both regular members and was open to newcomers (so there was a flexible membership); all the members were women; and meetings were weekly, in the early evening, usually lasting between ninety minutes and two hours and involving some coffee, maybe some food, some chat, but above all a coming together in the café to work on one’s own individual knitting ‘projects’. Secondly, I joined with ‘Stoke Knittington’, also in London but, as their name indicates, based in the East London area of Stoke Newington, Hackney. Here, I worked with the group over a four month period as they developed a collective project, a knitted model of Stoke Newington Common. The group met in one of the member’s home on the Common; in total there were around 20 women who made up Stoke Knittington. I also interviewed some of the members about the project and the group outside of the normal meetings.

Thirdly, I joined with ‘Carers U Knitted’, a group based in my ‘home town’ of Warrington in the North West of England. I worked with them over a five month period. Carers U Knitted meet at least weekly in a local community centre, for four hours during the daytime on a weekday. All the members are women and all have caring responsibilities. The group is designed to create a space for its members to

have time, an activity and a social network that offers some respite from their unpaid caring work. It is based in, and draws its membership from, the Carers' Centre in Warrington. The Centre is a service for carers 'who without payment help or support a relative, child, neighbour or friend who because of illness, disability, frailty or addiction is unable to manage alone'. The group combines working on individual projects with group projects, including some local 'yarnbombing'. I participated in group meetings and I also interviewed some of the group members individually. Fourth, and finally, I also attended knitting and crochet classes over a three-month period at the Mary Ward Centre for Adult Learning in the Bloomsbury area of central London. Here I learnt to crochet (*or not*, as I will explore later on in this chapter). All of these knitting groups and classes I discovered through their social media presence. In all cases, I applied the same sorts of ethnographic documentation as I undertook at knitting events, with the exception of photography (in order to ensure the pseudonymity of members I only photographed the knitted materials rather than people). As I was knitting or crocheting too, it was not possible to take many 'scratch notes' in the course of these meetings but I wrote up research diary entries after them (more generally, on ethnographic research, 'fieldnotes' and diaries see Emerson *et al*, 2011; Sanjek, 1990). For daytime meetings, I wrote these diary entries straight afterwards; for some evening meetings, I did this in two stages, drafting initial reminders on the same night, and writing them through the following morning.

Around eighty women (through their participation in knitting groups, at events, and interviews) were part of this research, of which sixty were from knitting groups in London (Hammersmith and Stoke Newington) and the North West (Warrington, and to a lesser extent, Manchester). In London, participants were diverse in terms of age, lifecycle stage and household size – but they did represent a specific ethnic and socio-economic sub-set of the London boroughs that research took place in. Stoke Newington is in the borough of Hackney which is one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in the country with over 40% of its population identifying as non-white. Hackney is a very symbolic urban location – of migration, community organisation, social mix, and creativity; as such, it has attracted significant attention from academics and geographers in particular (Neal *et al*, 2016). Stoke Newington has proportionately more white British, and fewer black African people than

Hackney as a whole¹ and half of adults living the ward have degree-level qualifications or higher. The knitting group I attended represented this demographic with participants aged between 30-70 (which is representative of 50% of the population in Stoke Newington) and the women being well educated and in, or retired from, professional employment. Overall, there was little socio-economic and ethnic diversity in the knitting group itself, which was a source of discomfort for members who had actively tried to recruit broadly beyond their existing friendships. In Hammersmith participants in the knitting group were late 20s to early 60s in age (an age range which makes up 73% of the population in that area²). The women were well-educated and in professional occupations. The group was diverse in that members were from the US, Europe, and many of them were 'new' to London from Wales, Scotland, or the North of England. Yet despite 51% of the population in Hammersmith identifying from an ethnic group other than White British, there was little socio-economic or ethnic diversity in the knitting group as a whole.

As I detail in this chapter, following concerns about the particular demographic of London and its knitting groups I sought to research in my hometown, Warrington. Unlike Hackney, as a place of interest Warrington swims against many currents of contemporary academic culture and its concerns with creativity. According to the Royal Society of Arts (2015) Warrington is the worst town for culture in Britain (of 325 places researched). In Warrington, I engaged with a knitting group of which there were around twenty members and I conducted interviews with 12 of these. There was a much broader age bracket here with women between aged between 20-75. Warrington as an area is less ethnically diverse than England as a whole – 91% of residents are born in England and only 4.1% of its population identify as non-white³. The group itself, however, was more ethnically diverse than those in Hackney and Hammersmith. Of twenty members, four of the women who attended were not born in England and had English as a second language. The women were primarily carers, retired, and were not in full-time employment. Only 33% of the population in Warrington works in a professional capacity (higher managerial or professional capacity). In short, this knitting group were different in socio-economic class to knitting groups in Stoke Newington and London, which allowed certain comparisons to be made in the research analysis on knitting as connecting across diverse identities. In addition to my research with the Carers U

Knitted group, I also interviewed fifteen ‘lone’ knitters in the Warrington region. These knitters were selected by their age, primarily; each knitter was over 65 and at least five of these knitters were over 75. These knitters were ‘domestic’ knitters – in that they learned to craft from an age where learning the craft was mandatory in schools and, at some point, it had been part of their ‘domestic chores’ or work. As I will discuss in more detail in the analysis, they did not participate in knitting groups.

As Jo Turney (2009; 8) suggested, “when one first thinks of knitting, one thinks of women”. As discussed throughout this thesis, knitting, as a creative activity, is gendered socially, historically and culturally. Feminist methodologies are not framed around simply attending to women’s spaces instead of men’s spaces, rather they are framed around how spaces become constructed and gendered in certain ways (Domosh 1997). However, I explicitly focused on women’s everyday lives, spaces and practices. I did encounter men in my research, but never in my knitting groups and rarely at events (as I will discuss in Chapter Four this was highlighted at the Knitting and Stitch Show, where gendered toilets all become ‘female’ toilets to accommodate for the audience). More particularly, when I did encounter men at events this was often by reputation of their gendered exception. For example, Tom of Holland⁴ is a knitter who has developed a reputation in various knitting circles and events for his darning skills. My decision to focus on women knitters is not intended to belie the skill of men like Tom of Holland nor the important work they do to open up knitting as a craft, skill and practice that is not innately female. Rather, I thought to pay attention to such exceptional men would weaken my desire to focus on women’s lives and their creativity.

Familiar yarns

As I will explore in my empirical chapters, my initial reliance on social media and the web to access knitters clearly shaped my ‘field-work’ in particular ways. This is not to negate the very local, and embodied, geographies I experienced by participating in the groups detailed above. I did feel that I was moving beyond solely the fashionable and public scene of knitting that predominates on social media. However, more generally, in the rush to celebrate the visibility and popularity of knitting, I felt that there was, perhaps, broader neglect of *knitted*

geographies that were off the (online) map. This was a neglect that I wanted my research to acknowledge and to address. Throughout my PhD, and as I will continue to argue, this research has been about collecting stories. Often, friends and family members would tell me about their ‘family friend’ or ‘family member’ who was an enthusiastic knitter and suggest that they would be interested in my project. I decided, then, to pursue these leads and interview these various knitters; who largely were not part of knitting groups, or even aware of the influence of Web 2.0 on the crafting of their knitting worlds (see Gaunlett, 2011).

This also involved a shift in location. The majority of the fieldwork discussed in this thesis is based in London (though I have signalled the exception of the Carers U Knitted group above). I moved to London in 2011 to begin my PhD research at Royal Holloway, University of London. Until then, I had always lived in the North-West of England, for both my undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, and close to my family. I think, because of these emotional connections to place, I started to feel like I wanted to research the experience of women from ‘home’ and the North West as I felt they would tell a different story to those I had collected of the knitters I had met in London. This was not to ‘fix’ people into place; rather it was to look at questions of fixity, mobility, leisure and work across gender, class and space (Taylor, 2011). My personal connections and family relations as a researcher allowed me to access knitters who were, perhaps, less visible or otherwise would not have been involved in the project. These emotional, familiar relations that allow us to access certain geographies as researchers are underexplored. Indeed, Hall (2014; 2192) has encouraged that we attend to the “personal and emotional (and also gendered) geographies of families, friendship, and care in the context of fieldwork.”

As a result I conducted interviews with ten ‘lone knitters’ – knitters who knitted at home and actively did not take part in knitting groups or festivals. I wanted to explore their personal geographies and experience of creativity within home life. I was careful not to posit these as ‘private’ versus ‘public’ knitters; rather I hoped to explore the various concepts of public and private through researching with these particular crafters. These types of geographies ‘in the home’ that engage with embodied, domestic practices that have ‘creative’ potential have been previously put forward by feminist scholars and geographers. For example: cooking (Longhurst,

2009); laundry, cleaning and everyday practice (Pink, 2012); and collecting or ridding around the family (Gregson, 2008). Researching in the home-required different ethical considerations, and as a researcher 'leaving the field' here has been incomplete and less 'final' –invested in feminist and participatory methodologies, I recognised that it would be a complex, open and emergent process (see Pain *et al*, 2007).

This was compounded when I unexpectedly had to move back to my parents' home in the North West in the fourth year of my PhD; it felt that I also unexpectedly 're-entered' the field. Hall (2014) has described these methodological issues of proximity and intimacy that 'researching close to home' brings to the fore. I have found myself visiting the knitters (family friends and friend's family) I had interviewed because I had bumped into them on the street, or at the shops. I have provided regular updates on my PhD, and continued to find out about their projects and family developments. In a practical sense this probably affected the productivity of the 'writing up of my research', which is one academic output from this process, but as Jupp (2007; 2842) reflected on her own experience:

“Being present over time, sharing experiences and activities together, like planting potatoes or making paper lanterns, creates its own connections and shared memories (...) the moments in my fieldwork which have felt the most productive or exciting for me have been a good conversation or just a cup of tea together on the steps of the community house which may be difficult to represent in writing up the research.”

In sum, researching with family and friends has provided me with an insight into personal geographies of knitting that might be, perhaps, 'off the map' of contemporary, visible knitting scenes. I also found that working with individual, amateur knitters in their home has been more participatory than taking part in knitting groups was. The research relationships have been built upon gentle geographies; instances of kindness and understanding, silences and sometimes, just listening to their stories (Askin, 2014). This is not to romanticise the research, especially because not all researchers may be in a position to return home and research their family and friends – this could be painful, or have negative

experiences for some. However, for me, this work with ‘familiar yarns’ was an important counterpoint to the awkward and uncomfortable moments that often characterise ‘field’ experiences; I would encourage geographers to recognise the importance of small acts of making that make up research relationships.

Spinning yarns: multiples stories, multiple lives

The epistemological challenge of this research was the bringing together of multiple stories – not only empirically, but in terms of ‘knitting together’ academic literatures too. The result is that this thesis is a collection of stories, fragments and yarns. Empirically, I collected yarns in two ways. Firstly, there were the more traditional sorts of ethnographic fieldwork outlined above, and upon which I elaborate further in the second half of this chapter when I turn my focus on to some of the methods I used, including conversational interviewing. Here, then, I was following multiple case studies, finding small stories in events, festivals, meetings and interviews. Secondly, however, I also accumulated a significant ‘archive’ of ephemera (leaflets, postcards, knits I had been gifted). These sat alongside the multiple links and information flows that I was generating through social media. I did not analyse this material as part of my methodological approach, but rather this acted as a creative ‘stash’ in a similar way to a crafter’s stashes of materials and patterns, hoarded for future inspiration.

Across a range of sites, and through a variety of methods and materials, I curated the empirical stories and yarns through which I knitted together my thesis. Lorimer and Parr (2014) have suggested that ‘storytelling’ has ‘come of age’ within Geography. Increasingly, geographers are producing narratives that are attuned to ‘affective worlds of hope, anxiety care, joy, desperation, enchantment and desire’; they are also increasingly questioning the narrative arc of traditional writing. In my focus on knitted geographies as a collection of yarns, my focus was rather less on textual experimentation or overall narrative arc. I was also not particularly concerned with my own signature and written voice, beyond the common concerns with creating an engaging thesis that could combine nuance and subtlety with clarity. Rather, methodologically, my preoccupation was with the stories in my archive of materials. Generally, I want to argue in this thesis that ‘small stories’ that

are attentive to objects, things and people that are taken for granted are worthy of telling, precisely because they are deemed so mundane. This speaks to Cameron's (2012; 588) call for geographers to question: "what is at stake when one turns one's attention to small and local stories, and asks what is expressed and revealed by such stories?"

I collected such stories or 'yarns' in various ways – through interviews, participation, ethnographic fieldnotes and interviews, and photography. Alongside this, I also contributed tweets and blogs. I used a website called 'Storify' which allows users to collate tweets under a hashtag for an event and thus tell a story from their social media presence. I did this for three events I refer to in this thesis: Knitting and Stitch Show, Wool House and Unravel. As noted above, I also collected a large amount of research ephemera and news articles over the research process. DeLyser (2015; 211) has suggested that "though geographers have approached the archive in creative and innovative ways, little has been written about collecting these materials ourselves, keeping this archive in our own domestic spaces, and what such collecting and domestic practices can do for research". During my research, my material collection included the following: 40 balls of yarn, bought at fayres and festivals, 13 festival catalogues or booklets, 20 business cards from knitters and artists, 20 newspaper cuttings of yarnbombers that were gifted from friends and family, 12 exhibition catalogues, 10 symposium programmes relating to craft, making and textiles, 10 catalogues relating to 10 specific textile artists that I had interviewed, or seen exhibited in a show, 45 leaflets, or postcards related to the promotion of wool in shops and fashion.



Figure 3.2: Example of some ephemera collected over course of fieldwork. Author's own.



Figure 3.3: Example of knits collected (mostly gifted) over course of fieldwork. Author's own.

This personal archive was not intentional; though I have always collected postcards, and leaflets from events and holidays. To coin DyLeser (2015; 209) “these objects can be (inter) personally engaged to uncover intimate geographies of social

memory”. In short, I did not plan to, and have not analysed these materials in a substantive way; rather the process of collecting represents a personal reaction to the enchantment of objects (Cresswell, 2012). Indeed, the act of collecting and archiving tells the story of the research itself, so that when I ‘entered the archive’ (drawers under my bed) I felt I was ‘back in’ my research – surrounded by the events, people I had met, stories to reflect and consider. What I also did not anticipate was how my participants, family and friends would also contribute to this archive. I received newspaper cut outs, knitting patterns, wool, postcards, all sorts of stuff that people had seen and thought related to the research project. This gifting, I think, shows the particular capacity of knitting to encourage convivial relationships, and the sharing of stories and things – more enchanting and affirmative geographies, of a fashion (Woodyer and Geoghagen, 2013).

Researching knitting: research methods

Having set out the epistemological approach and process of the research, in the second half of the chapter I now turn to discuss some of the research methods that I used. Rather than reproducing the generic methodological guidance on their conduct, my purpose is more focused. As I highlighted in the introduction to this chapter, research on knitting raises a wider concern with accessing, representing and performing sensoriality, tactility and material vibrancy in research (Pink, 2012; Lorimer, 2005; Crang, 2005). Running throughout such discussions is the question of the value of different methods for ‘getting at’ people’s relationships to materials. It is in that particular light that I want to discuss my use of interviewing, participant observation, and photographic documentation.

Talking knitting, or how knitting talks

As indicated already, interviews of various sorts were an important component of my research practice. These included conversational semi-structured interviews, where time was set aside and I and an interviewee met in a suitable venue to talk about their knitting. These interviews involved a consent process and they were recorded and transcribed. The texture of the conversations varied across different kinds of interviewees and my differing relationships with them. Interviewees included: figures on ‘the knitting scene’ whom I had approached and who kindly

agreed to speak to me as a researcher; some such figures who I got to know through working with them or meeting them in other contexts (such as the knitting artists whose work was used to introduce the thesis in Chapter One); people who I knew from knitting groups, but who I then interviewed individually; and the individual knitters who I already knew through family and friendship networks. I also conversed with people more ethnographically. When participating in knitting groups, my own 'knitting natter' inevitably was shaped by my research. This sort of conversation was not recorded, of course, and instead featured in my ethnographic field notes and diary entries, occasionally as a remembered quotation or phrase, more often in a reportage of exchanges within the group.

Generally, then, my own view was that broadly defined interview methods, based on talk, were not inappropriate for research on material practice. I reached this judgement in a context when many argue for research based on one's own practice and participation in creative practices. In other words, I want to argue for the value of more dialogic elements to research on material practice. Dowling *et al* (2015; 6) have recently argued "qualitative research through the interview is enriched through an expanded emphasis in human geography on the socio-materiality of human life and interrogation of the concept of representation in constructing knowledge". Indeed, one can document how geographers have begun to 'enrich' the interview process in various ways that recognise the importance of sensory experience, material environment and the embodied process of interviewing (Dowling, 2015). In total I conducted fifty interviews with knitters recruited from knitting groups, craft projects, individual yarnbombers and textile artists; and ten interviews with individual knitters. Each of these interviewees had a different relationship to knitting, which I explore over the course of the thesis' empirical chapters. But for now, based on that interviewing, my methodological conclusion is that geographers have underestimated the power, and indeed importance, of the interview in researching geographies of making. Instead, participation, learning by doing and reflecting on the experience of making has been placed at the fore (Paton, 2013; Ocejo, 2014; Patchett, 2015), of which more below.

Broadly, then, I am in agreement with Woodward (2015; 8) and her assertion:

"Whilst words may not be enough in themselves to allow us to understand

material practices they are still part of how people articulate their relationship to things. Given how many social science methods centre upon people's verbal accounts, it is important to think critically about what these accounts allow us to understand about material practices.”

During interviews I would often frame questions around the knitter's favourite, least favourite, or current projects (see figure 2.4, ‘Teresa's Cardigans’ for example). Often these projects were in the vicinity and touched and exchanged as part of the conversation. Asking about projects would unpack various relations. Firstly, it allowed makers to discuss the biography of said knitting, including: who the project was being made for (obviously, this include themselves but often involved others); how they decided upon that particular idea; where the materials and patterns were sourced; and where they had been working on this project, and for how long for. I enjoyed listening to their stories; partly because they were inherently engaging; partly because I could sense how focusing on materials in this way opened up rich seams of talk, even for those who found the interview process somewhat unfamiliar. Secondly, by wool and knitted objects being present during interviews, the material was always at the fore (Woodward, 2015; Pink, 2015). Sometimes, through picking up projects or just ‘feeling’ yarn, discussions on tactility, multisensoriality and materiality were shaped. For example, as Figure 2.4 shows, Teresa showed me her collection of ‘house cardigans’ to keep her warm around the home. She has short arms, and usually has to ‘roll the sleeves up’ of shop bought cardigans. Teresa encouraged me to feel the cardigans and their warmth, describing how she achieved the waffle pattern in the process.



Figure 3.4: Teresa's Cardigans, Author's own.

Although, as I will elaborate on further below, there is something important in participating in knitting and understanding the technical aspects of craft itself, I think there was also something important in listening to participants articulate or represent their own knowledge and experience. My participants talked lucidly and vibrantly. Like Hitchings (2012), my own experience was that we should not assume participants cannot talk about their embodied practices, especially when researching making. Most knitters I met were enthusiasts and enjoyed having the time to discuss their practice – especially those who were already part of knitting groups or attended festivals regularly. In other cases, people appreciated having their craft taken seriously and paid some respect. As outlined above, in one strand of my research I engaged with ‘lone’ knitters and people who were less visible on ‘knitting scenes’. These participants were somewhat incredulous that their hobbies might be of academic interest, reflecting how hobbies as social practices may be about routine and affect people in ways that are rarely recognised as important (Pink, 2012). Here my interviewing experiences seem similar to Stalp in her research with quilters (2008; 7): “[the] women I interviewed value quilting on many important levels, yet they do not expect non-quilters to be interested in it, or value quilting in the same ways that they do. Because of this, some quilters thought it unusual that I as a researcher would want to interview them about quilting.” Yet, within this ‘surprise’ about a researcher’s interest lie the very reasons academics *should* be

interested in these craft practices. I found the process of interviewing these knitters (and accepting the initial awkwardness and sometimes silences that came with that) the most transformative part of this methodology. Within these interviews, women were drawn into discussing their practice with knowledge, passion and eloquence, as Barbara illustrates below:

“I’ve started making these Christmas Trees now you know, and I’m like that (tenses body and pulls face to illustrate concentration) – really concentrating with it, that I’ve not had time to join in with the group yarnbombing today. It’s the first one I’ve followed the pattern. It’s like, you’re just shaping it and it’s growing as you do, it’s alright doing it just straight (knitting) isn’t it – but when you’re following a pattern and you’re putting that shape in (uses hands to gesture stitching) and I want it right, you know, I want it to be right”.

(Interview with Barbara, November 2013)

I will argue in this thesis that, ultimately, the skill and labour of knitting is undervalued (Newington, 2014; Turney, 2009). Providing a space for discussion, and being an active listener, seemed to encourage knitters to articulate how much their craft shaped their personal and social geographies. In this regard, not being pre-occupied with my own practice and expertise was helpful. When researching amateur creativity you meet people with varied skilled sets. Some knitters that I interviewed had been knitting for years and could eloquently articulate craft process, technical terms and what their craft meant to them. Other knitters were beginners, participating for the first time. By acting as a ‘researcher’ rather than a ‘knitter’ it allowed these ‘unskilled’ knitters, of a fashion, to feel confident in sharing their knowledge. As Pitt (2015; 53) has noted on her work with community gardening: “some gardeners resisted identification as experts because they had ‘only’ taught themselves, or did not know the ‘proper’ names of plants. These feelings might be reinforced if, as I recommend, botanists are involved in research because they may be regarded as ‘more expert experts’ and deter others from offering guidance”.

In summary, various sorts of ‘enriched’ interview (Dowling, 2015) (talking about wool, with wool, and with wool taking a part) allowed both for an exchange between research and maker expertise, and for the expertise of the material to be

present (Pitt, 2015; Pink, 2012; Woodward, 2015). Of course, the point of ethnography is to know the world as others do (Crang and Cook, 2007); but in the rush to participate, we should be careful that we are ethically generous, participatory and take seriously the expertise of makers to articulate their embodied skill and knowledge (Hitchings, 2012; Pain, 2004).

Exploring amateur creativity and geographers' creative practice

Of course I also participated directly in a range of knitting spaces and social networks. As outlined earlier in the chapter, this involved ethnographic participant-observation at selected knitting and craft festivals and events as well as within four main knitting groups. A specific issue in the context of ethnographic research on a creative practice such as knitting, is the extent to which the researcher herself needs to become a skilled practitioner, to do what she studies, and to develop this skilled practice as a 'creative' research method. Patchette uses the literal and metaphorical notion of an apprenticeship to describe what she sees as involved in studying craft practices:

“When studying craftwork it requires not just the personal instruction of a good teacher and thus placing ourselves in the position of apprentice, it requires working with an ethic of the apprenticeship – an ethic that recognises that we need to be prepared to experiment and put ourselves and our theories at risk in order to produce methods that openly and creatively respond to our more than human, more than textual, multisensorial worlds” (Patchett, 2015; 92).

Geographers have long employed creative and participatory methods to 'get at' certain knowledges that may only be appreciated by *taking part*. Sometimes, this means building upon existing skills, interests or disciplines to become, for example, an artist-geographer or geographer-poet (Crouch, 2010; Cresswell, 2015). Hawkins (2013) has highlighted the 'arsenal' of 'creative geographies' that academics now employ and the importance of *doings* and *makings* to geographical methods (also, see Hawkins (2011), Hawkins (2015) for expansion). In part, the celebration of these methods is related to contemporary interest in more-than-representational and affectual geographies. Whilst feminist geographers have long encouraged personal

and embodied methodologies (see Longhurst, 2009), it seems creative practices are celebrated because there is something in *doing* and *making* that more traditional methods fall short on. To access these creative, sometimes haptic, knowledges, the body, therefore, becomes an increasingly important tool in research (Crang, 2003; Woodyer, 2009).

It makes sense that researchers approach subjects they enjoy and represent worlds they are part of. Again, feminist geographers have long encouraged researchers to recognise the entanglement of personal and professional identities in research. So, naturally, geographers have looked to their hobbies, skills, crafts or previous disciplinary training outside of geography to research. For example: surfing and surfboard making, sculpture, painting, videography (Warren, 2014; Paton, 2013; Crouch 2010; Garratt 2013). Latterly, and particularly in relation to ‘craft’, geographers have pursued ‘apprenticeships’ in the more literal as well as ethical framing posited by Patchette (2015). These apprenticeships are about learning by doing, becoming skilled, and gaining new expertise and material knowledges (O’Connor, 2009). As Ingold (2002; 21) has argued, “to show something to somebody is to cause it to be seen, or otherwise experienced – whether by touch, taste, smell, or hearing – by that other person. It is, as it were, to lift a veil off some aspect or component of the environment so that it can be apprehended directly”. In this spirit, we find that geographers have become apprentice to creative practitioners and labours who employ ‘skilled expertise’, in order to reflect, often autoethnographically, on the process and practice that they employ through their hobby, or work, and the spaces they occupy. Geographers have become assistant hairdressers (Holmes, 2014), butchers (Ocejo, 2014), sculptors (Paton, 2013), vine farmers (Krzywoszynska, 2015), and gardeners (Pitt, 2015).

In previous research, I have also worked as an apprentice – latterly as a florist in a research project on gender, design and creative labour in independent flower shops. This experience taught me about working in craft spaces, being among the mess of ‘materials’ and the way ‘making’ bodies navigate spaces ritualistically that reflect habit, skill and craftsmanship. However, less work has been done on occupying the spaces of amateur creativity and skill. I think, in part, this is because their ‘amateur status’ has a degree of openness that encourages academics to ‘have a go’ –

participation often happens in the moment, in the event (Jupp, 2007; Pain *et al*, 2007). This was certainly my experience, mostly at the encouragement of my participants. I have knitted and crocheted all sorts of objects for craft groups, worked a spinning wheel, felted wool, sewed buttons, and learnt to darn (as part of my first ever conference experience during which I stayed in a tent for three days on a working farm⁸). There is no denying that my body has been present throughout this process – in comfortable and uncomfortable situations -- and possibly I could have approached this research through autoethnographic sensibilities to tell these stories (Cook, 2009; Besio, 2009).

I think there is also a material and metaphorical openness that working with yarn affords in terms of opportunities to participate and experiment. Richard Ocejo (2014) discusses the substandard ‘patties’ he made as an intern in a New York butchers; the patties browned and became waste as he overworked the meat with unskilled hands. Similarly, Harriet Hawkins (2015) has discussed her poor drawing skills in her artist-geographer collaboration. My own view is that the materiality of the making processes that geographers engage with matters. This speaks to Askins and Pain’s (2012; 817) suggestion that “there is a need to connect understandings of creative methodologies with current debates on materiality, to interrogate more closely how participation may be dis/enabled”. As a florist, I did minimal jobs because flowers are expensive and if I experimented incorrectly I would waste stock. With knitting, the possibilities are more open. Certainly, yarn can become over-worked and damaged (especially, if like me you find yourself knitting extra stitches into yarns that have split) but on the whole knitting, and crochet, can always be un-done, un-picked and projects restarted. Methodologically, knitting is a craft that encourages participation in the doing.

At the same time, I have to admit, I am generally quite bad at knitting and crochet. It was a source of embarrassment throughout my PhD process. As an extract from my fieldnotes post-knitting lesson will attest: “I am *so* fed up. I have been trying to crochet for two hours. I just want to make a granny square. It gets to a point where it is progressing then I have to start all over again. Jean next to me is giving up. She really wants to learn to crochet to expand her hand-made jewellery line with delicate

⁸ This was for the Mend*rs conference in July, 2012. It took place in the unique setting of Mezbar, Lake District.

crochet lace earrings. She sighs, squeezes my arm and says she's going home. She's got a headache. She's abandoning ship. I look over at Linda and she's made two granny squares already. They're beautiful. I look down at my mangled mess in my hands and think '*there's always next lesson*'."

Woodward (2015; 9) stated similar doubts in her work collaborative research project on jeans and the materiality of denim:

"The unfamiliarity of textile tests, coupled with a feeling that I 'ought' to know more of the technical terms for analysing fibres, has led to a feeling of anxiety about my perceived lack of knowledge. This feeling has been minimised through the informal discussions; in interdisciplinary projects a feeling of inadequacy or lack of understanding must be quite common but is not written about".

I feel that I wasted considerable energy by worrying about being, frankly, *bad* at knitting. I knew enough to participate, understand and enjoy spaces of knitting. I even enjoyed buying yarn at festivals, hopeful one day that I would be proficient enough to use it well. But the feeling of enthusiasm and flow I found my participants discussing never really arrived as I thought it might. Harriet Hawkins (2015; 49) addresses this anxiety over creative geographies more generally:

"Caught up in the excitement of practices and themes shared, we perhaps risk losing sight of (and so devaluing) our own disciplinary and practice schoolings. For geography and the arts alike, these bodies of knowledge and practice involve long apprenticeships including much repetition and critical reflection. Such temporalities and practices do not always mesh with the demands of contemporary scholarship... Importantly though, this is not to fetishize skill, to somehow confine the practice of creative geographies to the already expert, but it is rather to ask for self-reflection on the part of skilled and amateur practitioners alike. Such reflections enable both a respectful valuation of skill sets and the expertly produced creative output, but also make space for a consideration of what can be gained in the doing and in the course of learning to do" (Hawkins, 2015; 249).

More than this, there is a danger that we value embodied doing, or research through the body, as somehow more true or valued (Crang, 2003). As Hawkins (2015; 249) has asserted, “to label some methods or ways of making geographical knowledge as creative brings a dual danger: that of both falsely denoting other methods as uncreative and that of marking out the research produced through creative methods as somehow different and therefore, depending on your perspective, more or less worthy/political/rigorous” (Hawkins, 2015; 249).

In the end, I decided to accept that I was quite poor at knitting. I still participated, of course. At knitting groups and events I would knit garter stitch, which is plain, rhythmic and easy for my unskilled hands to find a flow and be productive with. I appreciated the instances for participation that my limited expertise would allow. Ultimately, though, I found benefits in my craft limitations. Being unskilled (of sorts) provided more transformative interview experiences for the more amateur knitters, as discussed above. With more self-confident and expert knitters, it enabled a shift in the power dynamics of researcher/researched in which their expertise as knitter, and my own as researcher, could engage. In the end, looking at the research in the round, I was less concerned about my own practice and more concerned with allowing my participants to show and talk theirs (Hitchings, 2012). In doing so, I felt I harnessed my own skills as a geographer to help tell their stories in some small way.

Taking pictures of knits

Throughout this thesis I have integrated images from events attended, of yarnbombs and collectively produced knits observed, and of knitted objects discussed during interviews. All of these images were taken on my iPhone 4 and, latterly, iPhone 5. I am not a skilled photographer, and I did not realise the sheer volume of images I had collected (5,600 photographs) until my writing up stage. I would attend an interview, a knitting group, or observe a yarnbomb and take pictures with my phone. As it happens, for the majority of my empirical research my iPhone ‘case’ was a ‘faux’ cassette case. Often, this combination of case and camera provoked conversation on old technologies, memories of material collections, or simply humour at the juxtaposition of (now mostly redundant) cassettes against the ‘symbol of contemporary consumerism’ – the iPhone. Of

course, through consent processes participants always knew that images might be used for my thesis, but in the moment, in the *doing* and *taking* of pictures, the iPhone was un-intrusive in both its informality and materiality.

It was only on reflection, and over time, that I began to realise the extent of the ‘affective archive’ (Latham and McCormack, 2009) I had produced. These images had documented the stuff, the material, the making, the doing and the *feelings* of research. Their collective aesthetic is generative and expressive of my embodied experience of my (very material) research field (Latham and McCormack, 2009). A camera in hand can heighten awareness of the visual and the material aspects of space. It can make us look at space (Hunt, 2014; 165). Indeed, as Hunt (2014; 159) puts it, “the camera can help tune into the significance of everyday textures and the matter of things”. For Hunt (2014; 163) “making an image is an event, an invitation for exchange, and a moment that cultivates and reveals our relationships with a space, its objects and its people”.



Figure 3.5: Capturing fleece at Knitting and Stitch Show. Author's own.



Figure 3.6: Documenting Yarnbombs, Knit the City. Author's own.

So then, how have I used images throughout the thesis and what do I hope they are doing to support my arguments? On a basic level, I hope images are illustrative of the various knitted objects I engaged with during research. As Rose and Tolia-Kelly (2012; 3) put it, “the visual is an embodied, material and often politically charged realm”, indeed, “the ‘visual’ and the ‘material’ should be understood as in continual dialogue and co-constitution.” In short, I thought images would, as Rose (2008; 158) puts it, ‘convey the qualities of materiality more directly to the viewer’. These images do not illustrate an empirical reality; they are evocative rather than representational: “illustrative photographs, instead of just supporting a written argument, can enliven it, intensify it, or maybe disturb and haunt it—perhaps even answer back” (Rose, 2008; 154). The knitted objects I encountered throughout this research were colourful, skilful and textural. They evoked familiar *feelings* in many ways; the body recognises knitted fabric as cosy, warm, or maybe itchy and

suffocating. To attempt to represent these feelings through photographs then, “does not assume solidity of object and fixity of meaning, but incorporates the poetics of rhythms, forms, textures and the value of memory-matter engagement” (Rose and Tolia-Kelly, 2012; 5). The images throughout this thesis reflect “the sensory affordances of materials that can also incorporate a pluralistic account of reactions and interpretations that link to histories, memories and ecologies of seeing, feeling and perceiving” (Rose and Tolia-Kelly, 2012; 5).

Nearly all knitters I interviewed for this research stressed how they wanted the recipients of their goods to feel comforted materially, and sometimes emotionally, by their craft. Most of these knitters also wanted to have their skill and craft properly appreciated; the inclusion of photographs, then, is also an ethical consideration. My descriptions could not do justice to these knitted goods, and a reader of this thesis may be more, or less, proficient in understanding the technical skill involved in their production – so, to include photos that ‘represent’ the variety of craftsmanship I encountered during fieldwork is both ethical and sensible. The photographic illustrations in this thesis are “an attunement to collective, multiple and embodied textures” (Rose and Tolia-Kelly 2012; 4).

Conclusion

To conclude this methodological chapter, then, I have presented two main arguments. In the first half of the chapter I argued that the process of the research and its ‘fieldwork’ could usefully be rendered through the metaphor of ‘knitting together’. Responding to wider trends in the formation of a publicly visible, mediated ‘knitting scene’, the research looked to navigate this context through gathering multiple ‘yarns’, with a watchful eye on ensuring diversity of voices and practices. In the second half of the chapter I turned to focus on the specific methods appropriate to this task. I outlined how this research draws in particular on combinations of participant-observation, interviewing and conversation, and photographic response. In relation to wider debates over how best to research material geographies and practices of making, I argued that there is a danger in over-fetishising research undertaken through skilled, creative practice, and suggested that a wider array of methods, including those focused on talk and dialogue, can foster respectful and materially engaged research relationships and interpretations. It

is to those interpretations that I now turn, starting in Chapter Four with a focus on the empirical materials from the knitting festivals and events that I studied, framed in relation to wider debates over the place of knitting in contemporary cultures of consumption.

Chapter Four

Consuming: festivals, fibre and crafting space

“I sat down in the carriage and checked out ‘my stash’. I’d bought 10 balls of thick real wool that were only 50p each. They were course and tough to touch in purple and blue colours - they’d make a good foot-rug. A woman from across the train carriage shouted over at me waving large knitting needles: “You been at the festival too?” She’d come to ‘Unravel’ specifically to invest in thick jersey yarn and giant 26 mm needles to make cushion covers – she has to knit big, she said; she couldn’t knit without the instant gratification of something growing quickly. In the seat opposite a woman quietly knitted – she told me that she hadn’t bought anything today, she’d shown ‘restraint’, but she did enjoy checking out Susan Crawford’s Vintage Knitting stall for inspiration.”

(Unravel Fieldnotes, March, 2014)

“Knit your own”: consuming differently?

Throughout the period of researching and writing my PhD I have read countless media articles on knitting being fashionable, resurgent, popular, political, relaxing, and otherwise a generally good thing (Lewis, 2011; Luckhurst, 2014; Martinko, 2014). I’ve often felt weighed down by the burden of researching something ‘en vogue’. In ‘Why bother knitting a scarf?’ Katherine Martinko (2014) argued, “It’s a way to reclaim independence, help local industries, and make something by hand”. In a consumerist world where accumulation of stuff makes us more distanced from the labour and material processes through which things are made, craft connotes skill, love, passion and connection (Sennett, 2008; Crawford, 2009; Thurnell-Read, 2014; Warren and Gibson, 2014; Gauntlett, 2011). Notably, Colin Campbell (2005) has highlighted the role of the ‘craft consumer’ in consumption studies and social thought. He suggests that the craft consumer is: “a person who typically takes any number of ‘mass-produced’ products and employs these as the ‘raw materials’ for the creation of a new ‘product’ (...) the craft consumer is someone who transforms ‘commodities’ into personalized (or, one might say, ‘humanized’) objects (...) such consumption is usually characterized by a marked element of skill and mastery

whilst also allowing for creativity and self-expression” (Campbell, 2005; 27-28). Moreover, the craft consumer is often somebody with cultural capital and time to indulge leisure pursuits (Campbell, 2005).

This notion of craft consumption sits within wider geographical debates around consuming differently, alternatively, slowly and diversely (Gregson and Crewe, 2003; Gibson-Graham, 2008; Hayes-Conroy, 2011; Cook et al, 2011). As Kate Soper (2008) puts it, there is sensual pleasure to be taken from consuming differently; indeed ‘consuming differently’ must be pleasurable if it is to be viable replacement for a ‘consumerist society’. It is easily argued that craft consumption, with its focus on embodied doing, participation, skill, competence, autonomy and personalization (Watson, 2008; Gregson et al, 2009; Warren and Gibson, 2014; Yarwood and Shaw, 2011) provides these sensual ways of consuming differently. This ‘sensuality’ through craft evokes various emotional and affective geographies – joy, enchantment (Woodyer and Geoghagen, 2013), hope (Anderson, 2008), curiosity (Phillips, 2013), playfulness (Woodyer, 2012), boredom (Anderson, 2004) and an engagement with the onerous (Vannini and Taggart, 2014). These pleasures of crafting are celebrated in the knitting and fibre festivals I explore within this chapter. Indeed, focusing on quilters, Hui (2013) has explored the way that the pursuit of materials and an enthusiasm for crafting can shape the mobilities of crafters, as they negotiate their leisure time and spatialities around attending events, festivals and meet ups.

Thus far, the study of craft consumption has focused on the *doing* that takes place, often, at home (Watson, 2008; Gregson et al, 2009). Such work focuses on what is done with ‘raw materials’, ergo, speaking to the lacuna in consumption research on material agency and fibres themselves (Watson, 2008; O’Connor, 2006; Gregson *et al*, 2011). However, as I sketch out in this chapter, these knitting events and fibre festivals illustrate not only serious leisure commitment (Stebbins, 1992; Geoghagen, 2012; Hui, 2012) but also the consumption culture of knitting itself that occupies unique retail spaces and geographies. The temporariness of these knitting events speaks to the physical and imagined decline of wool shops from the British High

Street.⁹ On the opening of 'Wild and Woolly' in Clapton, London in 2014, owner Anna Felman stated: "*Wool shops were part of local high streets until 20 years ago and they died out in the 1980s (...) Older generations have come in to say it's nice that there's a wool shop in Clapton again. It feels like picking up a thread.*" (Interview with author, April 2014). As Nuala Rooney (2008) has argued, the 'wool shop' is emblematic of nostalgic retail space. The material abundance of shelves stacked with wool and the necessary reliance on the knowledge of 'friendly' knitters to transform the fibre to objects connotes a conviviality and sociability in retail space that is mourned in the shadows of contemporary consumer spaces of malls, on-line shops, supermarkets etc..

The events that I discuss in this chapter are another key contemporary space for knitting consumption. Here I focus on festivals and events, which celebrate the consumption of wool, yarn and fibre. Of course, there are still thriving wool shops, haberdasheries within department stores and online shops for people to buy their knitting goods, yarns, fibres, wools and so forth. Further, historically knitting has long been, and continues to be, sustained by diverse economies (Gibson-Graham, 2009) - the sharing of materials and skills for non-monetary exchange, the handing down of wool 'stashes' and patterns, for instance. However events such as the *Knitting and Stitch Show* and *Unravel* bring together various retailers to showcase their goods, set up temporary shop, and contribute to an experience/leisure event (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). These events are symptomatic of the wider fashion for knitting in particular and craft consumption more generally. This chapter therefore looks to explore them as spaces of consumption.

Compositionally, the main body of the chapter is structured into six parts. First, focusing on the *Knitting and Stitch Show* (London) and *Unravel* (Farnham) as exemplars, I outline the importance of such events and festivals as material sites of consumption and craft sociality, intersecting with trends in other retail spaces such as the high street wool shop and online knitting sites and communities. Second, I focus on the affectual materialities and embodied experiences of these events. Adding an account of the *Wool House* event organised in London in 2013 to my fieldnotes on the *Knitting and Stitch Show* and *Unravel*, I draw out the sensual nature of these events and the wider affective capitals thereby mobilised. In

⁹http://www.hackneygazette.co.uk/news/homerton_woman_brings_wool_shop_back_to_clapton_after_20_year_gap_1_3604476

particular, I emphasise the combination of ‘cosiness’ and seductive ‘excess’ staged in these events. Third, I turn to how these festivals present the provenance of wool, including through the material presence of sheep (both live and represented). I introduce a fourth example too, the Spitalfields City Farm ‘Wool and Craft Fayre’. Here, I trace out how these sheep and their associated imaginative geographies of rurality are part of a fashioning of this craft consumption as ‘good’ and moral. Fourth, I turn more directly to the people and socialities of the festivals, initially through drawing out how they foster a ‘neo-tribal’ (Maffesoli, 1996) identification as a knitter. Here I consider in particular the presence of ‘best in show’ competitions, interpreting these as symbolic of a wider emphasis on sharing one’s knitting with other participants. Fifth, I develop this focus on sociality and sharing through thinking about the role of workshops and more informal exchanges of expertise and enthusiasm at these events. I examine, then, the importance of what Bakardijeva (2005) calls ‘warm expertise’ to knitting consumption. Sixth, and finally, I offer an important note of caution. Having found these festivals to be sites of alternative hedonistic consumption, characterised by affective currents of enthusiasm, material abundance, sharing and warmth, I highlight some counter-currents that, in various ways, also make these festivals spaces of exclusion. This connects to a wider recognition of the social cartographies of knitting’s resurgence in contemporary British consumer cultures.

Crafting the scene at knitting and wool festivals.

The making of craft consumer spaces

The Knitting and Stitch Show is organised by ‘Twisted Thread’ events, which run a variety of craft and textile festivals. Knitting and Stich Show presents itself as *‘the definitive event for anyone with a love of stitch and craft events’*. The flagship event at Alexandra Palace has run annually since 1991, and more recently the event has been held in Harrogate, Dublin and Kensington Olympia for the ‘Spring’ Knitting and Stitch Show. According to ‘Twisted Thread’ (2014) the show *‘offers a winning formula of inspiration, shopping and learning’*. The Show brings together various retailers, organisations and guilds, from small and independent retailers to well-known brands, shops and magazines. In many ways, The Knitting and Stitch Show feels like

a ‘big event’ in a big building, the staging of a ‘world of knitting’; set in Alexandra Palace or Kensington Olympia, the overall impression combines Cathedral-like architecture with a somewhat overwhelming abundance of materials.. It does offer an array of craft materials beyond knitting, but its marketing as ‘The Knitting and Stitch Show’ speaks to the popularity of knitting as a craft, but also as a craft that can work to represent various genres through its status and multiple representations (Greenhalgh, 2002).



Figure 4.1: Left, Alexandra Palace Knitting and Stitch Show; Right, Kensington Olympia Knitting and Stitch Show. Author's own.

Unravel Festival is held at Farnham Maltings, Farnham¹⁰. The festival has run since 2008 and offers ‘a range of artisan yarns and accessories’ and ‘lots of opportunities to take part in woolly activities’ (Unravel, 2013). The emphasis at Unravel is locality and place – the event represents the wider ethos of Farnham Maltings as a ‘home’ for craft. Moreover, the commitment to place and ‘localness’ is evident in the stallholders who attend Unravel – these producers, designers and retailers have a more ‘indie’ and ‘alternative’ vibe that more obviously celebrates the aesthetics of craft, thrift and ‘making’ (Gregson and Crewe, 2003; Podkalicka, 2014). Unravel is also more

¹⁰ Farnham is referred to as a ‘craft town’. Historically, it has been known for its pottery production and educational commitment to craft through Farnham School of Art and Science and, more recently, University of Creative Arts, Farnham and the Crafts Study Centre. Farnham Maltings plays an important role in the promotion of the craft sector in Farnham, especially through its annual fairs such as Unravel.

obviously shaped by local regional guilds (Thomas *et al*, 2012). During interview, the organisers of Unravel re-enforced the difference they hoped to curate between their festival and the ‘big and cold’ Knitting and Stitch Show; their focus is on providing space for small, independent brands though they admitted that they needed to have some of the more well-known names to bring in the crowds.



*Figure 4.2: Unravel Knitting Festival - supported by local guilds and groups in Farnham
Maltings, Author's Own.*

Both The Knitting and Stitch Show and Unravel are key festivals in the knitting calendar. They function as a site of celebration and festival for communities of knitters who often connect online through Ravelry, blogs and other forms of social media, such as Twitter, that have sustained resurgent interest in knitting (Minehan and Cox, 2008).

“A lot of people have an online relationship but will arrange to meet here. Often, they’ll only meet face-to-face at Unravel. It’s really great the online community. We get a lot of bloggers coming, so that’s good.” (Unravel Organisers, Interview, January, 2014)

Louise Crewe (2011; 760) has argued that ‘material and virtual fashion worlds are perpetually intersecting social realities that coexist relationally, simultaneously, and in mutual connection’. Similarly, contemporary craft and knitting worlds are celebrated and sustained by the complex online/offline geographies that shape the consumer culture of knitting: “social media has given knitters new ways to think about and engage with their craft that, in turn, have become an embedded part of their construction and enjoyment of knitting as a leisure pursuit” (Orton-Johnson, 2014). Notably, this plays out on the online knitters network ‘Ravelry’, where yarn ‘stashs’, projects and patterns are documented, shared, and tinkered with, along with forums for knitting groups and events. So-called ‘virtual worlds’ have a material presence (Kinsley, 2013) and this is evident at Unravel and the Knitting and Stitch Show. Some exhibitors that I spoke to usually trade online only but such events provide a temporary material retail space which can be used to market that online presence and give it a new and engaging materiality for consumers. For visitors too, online and offline practices combine, as with the use of hashtags by knitters to document their day and connect with each other, which in turn affects their experience of the event.

“It's the last day of the @TwistedThread #KnitAndStitchShow who's coming to say hello today!? You can find @CraftCloset on stand F62!” (@ForgetMenotC, 2013)

“Amazing time @twistedthread knitting and stitch show today! My craft box will be brimming unlike my bank account #boughtsomuch!” (@PurpleLoud, 2013)

The making of festival atmospheres and cosy consumption space.

In this section I focus on the design of the events and the curation of spaces that in turn give each exhibit and event its ‘feel’ and ‘affective atmosphere’ (Anderson, 2009). For Jacob Miller, “researchers are only now beginning to investigate the full range of affective backgrounds that make up spaces of consumption and the politics therein” (Miller, 2014; 17). Hitherto, geographers have explored traditional consumption spaces of shopping centres, malls and markets and their affectual geographies and experience (Rose *et al*, 2010; Coles and Crang, 2010; Miller, 2014). Though less engaged in theories of affect and emotion, Nicky Gregson *et al* (2003) and their extensive research on ‘alternative consumption spaces’, such as car boot sales, retro retailers and charity shops, focused on the constitution of difference

through retail strategies to shape space and its experience. Gregson *et al* (2003; 67) argue that within alternative consumption spaces ‘the selection of goods for sale is a materialization of retailers’ own tastes and knowledges as well as their skills in restoration and repair (...); indeed the space of retro retail shops’ represents ‘the interior values and constitutes as pleasurable the effort – work even – that has to go into looking (and buying)’ (Gregson *et al*, 2003; 68). The festivals and events I attended curated the space by literally softening it. These were consumer spaces with knitted and woollen signs and decorations. They were a visual, tactile, sensorial celebration of craft consumer ethics of customization, personification and control over design and manufacture of products (Campbell, 2005). Coles and Crang (2010) describe Borough Market, London as “a place of touches” – “textures and sensations are experienced closer to the body than the other senses, and as an active sensing touch helps to shape the market’s economy (...) material, affective practices provide forces that energize this space of consumption”. Resolutely, touch, texture, and sensory experience forge these festivals as a craft environment. Yarns and fibres are selected through anticipation of material engagement with them:

“As I wondered idly around the festival, I approached a stall selling angora fibre. Unthinkingly, I picked up some display pom-poms and rolled them around in my hand – angora is soft, and light. I noticed the stallholder looking and put them down. She called over: ‘Please, don’t worry – keeping touching, isn’t it gorgeous? That’s what it’s all about.’” (Fieldnotes, Unravel, February, 2014)

“I rummaged in the baskets of balls of wool being sold for 50 pence and I overheard ‘God, they feel coarse, I wouldn’t want to work with them – no thank-you’.”

(Fieldnotes, Unravel, February, 2014)



Figure 4.3: Playful signage, Unravel Festival. Author's own.

Moreover, in this chapter I want to explore the idea of craft consumer spaces being *both* retail and workshop space. In doing so, I argue, craft consumer spaces facilitate the embodied creativity of those experiencing them, to both make *and* consume. Not only are knitting festivals and events about touch and texture, but also they are about the opportunities to blur the boundaries of consumption and production in retail space.

“Eventually we arrived at a car park ready for the festival and attached to a lamppost I spotted a turquoise arrow with ‘unravel’ knitted into it. We parked up and followed further knitted arrows multiplying in shape, colour, form and font. A pink arrow instructing ‘almost...’ was attached to the railings that saved the footpath from the canal/river below. Small ‘cosies’ were attached to mossy lampposts and crafted signage was everywhere. On the banks of the river was a giant, patchwork sign saying ‘WELCOME’ – I felt like Alice in Wonderland following the Cheshire Cat. As we approached

we came across a whole street sign that had been replicated in knitting, although the pole to which it was attached was stripy and colourful. There were even miniature knitted creatures attached to bushes – knitted spiders and ladybirds.”

(Unravel Fieldnotes, March, 2014)



Figure 4.4: Knitted Directions to Unravel Festival, Author's own.



Figure 4.5: Knitted London Taxi outside The Knitting and Stitch Show, Author's own.

The knitted arrows at Unravel and the taxi outside Knitting and Stitch Show (see Figure 4.5) were some of the material objects that decorated the events I attended and signalled the event as being crafted or knitted. They signal the rules of the space as being about touch, play, skill and material fibres; they suggest, even, that retail space itself can be re-made, crafted or knitted.

As I mentioned in my introductory descriptions of the Knitting and Stitch Show and Unravel, these are temporary festivals and events, a reflection of a post-high street society in which the stalwart ‘wool shop’ (Rooney, 2009) is mobile, online, eventful and temporary – a retail geography which speaks to the fluidity and uncertainty of craft itself (Adamson, 2007). This temporariness speaks to the idea that Bishop and Williams (2012) have termed ‘the temporary city’. Here, there are spaces that are increasingly ‘pop-up’, transient – again boundaries become blurred, this time between product and *experience* as the eventfulness of space becomes familiar through its temporality. I want to suggest that the knitting festivals and events I have discussed so far, deal with the transience of space through excess. Their excess of knitted cloth and material deals with the absence of permanence and the temporariness of the event by providing an opportunity for tactile, haptic, sensory engagement with the familiar fibres that attendees (knitters) curate their worlds with. This is something that Kevin Hetherington (2003) has termed ‘praesentia’ and he argues that the tactile experience of DIY skills can provide ‘praesentia’ through the materiality of anticipation, planning, forward thinking and improvement (Hetherington, 2003; 1942). Ergo, not only does the retail space itself become curated as an exhibition or gallery space of what can be achieved/crafted (Gregson et al, 2003) – the retailers and stallholders themselves provide completed objects as inspiration in a festival that celebrates fibre, material, on-goingness and craft-consumption.

The sense of “woolly” excess was enacted at the ‘Wool House’ event, in 2013. Wool House was *‘the world’s largest showcase of wool’*, where rooms within Somerset House, London were transformed with wool, showcasing designers and makers who use wool in their work, through fashion displays and events. It was curated and styled by Arabella McNie, and directed by Bridgette Kelly. The space was arranged into ‘rooms’ and transformed by a designer to show “the way wool can inhabit space”

through diverse use, colour, texture and creativity that spoke to contemporary and historical use of fibre. For example 'Natural Room', by designer Josephine Ryan, used naturally coloured and coarse textured wools in neutral shades. She made Arran jumpers for upholstery evoking a 'Celtic' vibe that reflected Ryan's Irish heritage. In contrast, 'Modern Room', by artist Anne Kyyro Quinn, created a 'contemporary living space' using bold colours, and shapes to show how '*modern*' wool can feel.

'Wool House' was supported by 'The Campaign for Wool', which describes itself as "uniting the international wool textile industry to promote real wool as the superior natural and sustainable fibre for fashion, interiors and the built environment. The Campaign is unique in how it has united farmers, industry users, leading brands, retailers of wool and wool lovers across the world" (Campaign for Wool, 2014). Whilst at Wool House, I spoke to Angela – an enthusiast and guild member who taught me to spin yarn. For Angela, Wool House "felt like a big old birthday party – and the person we're celebrating is Wool". At Wool House the imaginative geographies of knitting and the possibilities of craft consumer worlds were conveyed by the material abundance of woollen fibres that affected the haptic, optic and olfactory experience of the visitor:

"The rug beneath my feet was brightly coloured, it felt smooth and comfortable. The sheer volume of wool produced a heady, almost earthy smell. It smelt of newness, new cars, new carpets, and new clothes. It smelt luxurious, but almost earthy too. Knitted lampshades, chairs, beds, tables, and clothes – A woman nearby, similarly in awe, said to me 'Wow, I feel like I should have taken my shoes off at the door'."

(Wool House, Fieldnotes , March, 2013)



Figure 4.6: Natural Room, Josephine Ryan. Wool House. Author's own.



Figure 4.7: Modern Room, Anne Kyyro Quin, Wool House. Author's own.



Figure 4.8: Wool Nursery by Donna Wilson, Wool House, Author's own.



Figure 4.9: Knitted Chair with Crochet Bag, Wool House, Author's own.

Colin Campbell (2005) refers to the ‘raw materials’ that craft consumers use in their practice. This emphasis was expanded by Watson (2008) in his paper ‘The Materials of Consumption’, that urged for a focus on the competencies and agential properties of materials used in consumption. More broadly, Watson’s argument chimes with Tim Ingold’s (2008) argument for material culture to focus on materials, rather than an abstract, philosophically rendered materiality or solely the material objects beloved of material culture studies. Wool House was a celebration of consuming *material*; it achieved this by creating a transformative space where fibre can speak in multi-sensorial ways (Jackson et al, 2012). Knitting often connotes ordinariness, producing quotidian material that variably uses woollen fibres (Tourney, 2009; Black, 2012). Wool House presented knitting’s materiality to excess, overwhelming the visitor with a woollen sensorium.

Furthermore, if crafting is about working *with* materials to produce something (Paton, 2013; Watson, 2008), then the retail spaces of craft consumption must also function as a workshop space that celebrates the *doing*. The doing cannot be only consigned to what happens at home after acquisition (Gregson *et al*, 2009; Watson and Shove, 2008). I want to suggest that the *doing* is necessary, and the provision of sustained material engagement with woollen fibres in multisensory ways is important to the shaping of craft consumer shopping practices. Again the boundaries between consumption and production, temporary and permanent are blurred. This temporary, fluid space must always be on the go, invested in the making and doing. Paradoxically, then, it is necessary to seduce craft consumers committed to producing durable garments and things with *long* lives, hand crafted with sustainable fibres, through ephemeral, excessive, temporary spaces of consumption (Crewe, 2013).

Fibres: wool, sheep, yarn

So far, I have highlighted the spaces of craft consumption at festivals and events and have implied the importance of affect and material engagement with texture, and specifically woollen texture, in these spaces. I now want to expand this further by focusing on the celebration of *provenance* of wool and yarn at festivals, specifically by the creative co-presence of their non-human producers – sheep. At both Wool

House and Unravel Festival in 2013 sheep were present in a 'pop-up' farm. On the role of the pop up farm at Unravel Festival, the organisers argued:

“Yeah, it gives a space for people to know about the people who produce yarns, where it's produced, how it's produced - yarns, and sheep – they see for themselves that sheep have a happy life.”

(Interview, Unravel Organisers, January 2014).

In other words, the sheep and the pop-up farms are important in constructing a geographical imagination, or imaginative geography, of the materials of textile craft. Fashion geographers have hitherto suggested the importance of place in the consumption of cloth and fabric. For example, Louise Crewe (2013) argues that Harris Tweed performs as much as a place, or geographical imaginary, as a fabric; it is produced by place both materially and symbolically. For Alison Goodrum (2005) the leather bag company 'Mulberry' functions as place through its reliance on the geographically specific skills of tanning and saddling that produce the product. In building on those kinds of arguments, firstly, I want to explore the role of 'sheep' as animals and rural imaginary in producing the experience of knitting festivals and events. Secondly, I want to explore how sheep more broadly represent concern with provenance implicit in craft consumption and encourage more attention, or consideration, to what constitutes the 'raw materials' of craft consumption (Campbell, 2005).

In their discussion of moral consumption, Peter Jackson *et al* (2009) suggest that increasingly retailers like Marks and Spencer are keen to highlight where chickens are grown, right down to the farm – though at the same time the sharing of this knowledge is partial, given that full disclosure of growing and slaughtering of animals may make customers squeamish. Indeed, this reflects wider explorations by animal-geographers on the ability to develop attachment or connection to certain animals. Some animals are less easily connected to than others. For example, fish are alien to humans with their cold blood, scaly bodies and non-airy habitat (Bear and Eden, 2011); and slugs are 'domestic monsters' in gardens with slimy and oozing bodies (Ginn, 2013). In the case of wool production and sheep, it is relatively easy to *care* for sheep. They are fluffy, woolly, harm-less, and even comical:

“I’ve finished my day at Unravel and leave the building to go home. Outside there’s several sheep and a crowd around them. People are just watching, taking pictures, commenting on their movements, laughing. The sheep make little noise, there’s no ‘baa-ing’ or much movement really - they just huddle together quietly; indifferent to their relative celeb status”
(Unravel Festival, Fieldnotes, February, 2013)



Figure 4.10: Sheep enclosure, Wool House, Author's own.

“I stood and watched the sheep graze slowly. I overheard bemused observers: ‘Honestly, it was London Fashion Week last week, now there’s sheep in the courtyard – what’s that about?’ I was surprised by how *un-surprised* I felt. Why wouldn’t there be sheep? It’s Wool House – why wouldn’t they be on display? Though as I could hear the roar of traffic coming from the Strand it did feel oddly rural.”
(Wool House Fieldnotes, Fieldnotes, March, 2014)

The Campaign for Wool, the organisation behind Wool House, celebrates the creative co-presence and agency of sheep in the production process for wool. In so doing it constructs a narrative of ‘naturalness’ around woollen fibres and reinforces the moral and ethical consumption of wool.

“Wool is a protein fibre formed in the skin of sheep, and is thus one hundred percent natural, not man-made. Since the Stone Age, it has been appreciated as one of the most effective forms of all-weather protection known to man, and science is yet to produce a fibre which matches its unique properties.” (Campaign for Wool, 2014).

“As long as there is grass to graze on, every year sheep will produce a new fleece; making wool a renewable fibre source. Woolgrowers actively work to safeguard the environment and improve efficiency, endeavouring to make the wool industry sustainable for future generations.” (Campaign for Wool, 2014)

Whilst some luxury animal fibres such as animal fur, or indeed leather, may be relatively taboo and associated with a problematic morality to consumption, the materiality and animal-experience of sheep as mundane yet productive, agentive, creative and happy legitimises and promotes wool’s consumption as a sustainable fibre. Of course, this is a particular rendering of sheep production – they may not be battery farmed, but their lives may be intensively managed by timings of weight gain and meat value etc.. However, by placing sheep on display both Wool House and Unravel attempt to make visible the ‘invisibility’ of non-humans in consumption and construct craft consumption such as knitting as ethical, moral and sustainable (Jackson et al, 2008; Bear 2011; Jones 2000).

As highlighted in my fieldnotes reproduced above, the pop-up sheep pens at Wool House and Unravel also added a sense of ‘rurality’ to events. Jo Turney (2009: 71) has discussed the pervasive relationship of rurality and nostalgia with knitting, suggesting: “developed from Romantic sensibilities, constructs of the rural and untainted vernacular practices of ‘simple’ people, existing in more simple times, knitting often is situated within stasis”. However, the pop-up sheep pens, I suggest, do more than construct knitting and rural space romantically. Rather, they attempt to interrogate the boundaries between rural and urban, specifically the idea that fashion and material culture is bound to urban space and cities (Goodrum and Hunt, 2013). The presence of sheep in Somerset House, just off the Strand in central London, reminds us and validates assertions of wool as not just a rural

material but as a *good* material when moved to urban space. In fact, sheep (both real and illustrated) were ubiquitous at Wool House, its advertising materials, and in the branding of the Campaign for Wool (see for example Figures 4.11 and 4.12).



Figure 4.11: Sheep Portrait, Wool House. Author's own.



Figure 4.12: Sheep statues, Wool House. Author's own

It was not only the material presence of sheep at these events that helped to shape imaginative geographies of wool as a sustainable fibre, but also the ways in which they became characters in the performance of craft consumption. London. Here it is useful to introduce a further example, the yearly 'Wool and Craft Fayre' of Spitalfields City Farm in Tower Hamlets, East London. Situated on a former railway goods depot, the farm was started in 1978 in response to local people's wishes to convert wasteland into allotments. Today, it is a contemporary 'city farm'. It regularly holds educational festivals and events on cooking and 'caring for animals'. Its annual Wool and Craft Fayre both extends this history and chimes with wider social and cultural developments in the area, where rapid gentrification has gone hand in hand with an emergent taste for consumer and community events celebrating the 'urban pastoral' (Harris, 2012). The performative role of sheep as 'more than human' characters was highlighted at the live sheep shearing event held as part of Spitalfields 2014 Wool and Craft Fayre:

"I stood on my tip-toes to get a better look. I could hear the buzz of the razor. The crowd covered the sheep's pen – mostly families (very different demographic to the usual wool-fairs I've attended). I could see a man with a

sheep between his legs, the sheep wasn't moving. I overheard 'Is that sheep conscious?' (It was very still – nonplussed). He was moving the razor over the sheep and a thick, matted fleece lay at the side, only *just* still attached to the animal. The buzzing stopped and the shearer announced: 'I'm going to let her go now, she's naked so don't laugh. One thing I've learnt in life is never to laugh at a naked woman'. He let her go and she scrambled into the pen next door to join the other 'naked' sheep. I overheard a mum to her child: 'Don't they all look better now, and just think that wool could make a nice jumper for you one day.'"

(Spitalfields City Farm Wool Fayre, Fieldnotes, June, 2014)

Here, then, the 'Fayre' stages a performance of wool production methods. Of course, this is partial and carefully considered; sheep shearing is celebrated and brought to the city (farm), the associated sheep slaughtering involved in wool production is a very different matter. Not all woollen and knitting fibres are necessarily 100% wool and sustainable, and those that are attract premium pricing; a range of other production processes are involved (e.g. dyeing); yet sheep in their ubiquitous presence come to represent the whole wool production system as 'fluffy and woolly'. Sheep invest wool and knitting craft consumption with imaginative geographies of wool production as happy and healthy.

Best in Show

The various events I have been discussing – The Knitting and Stitch Show, Unravel, Wool House and Spitalfields City Farm Wool and Craft Fayre – are all busy and crowded. Their affective atmospheres and ambiances are not only shaped by their plethora of non-human, woolly materials but also by the people who constitute these crowds. As Gregson *et al* (1997; 2003) have illustrated in their work on car boot sales, consumer spaces are liminal and have to be produced by participants as an event. Punters at car boot sales, stall-holders at markets, dancing crowds at clubs – these various sociabilities produce the space and its experience. As Simone Fullagar (2012) has highlighted through her research on cycle touring, important to the experience of consuming differently is convivial communities that provide hedonist pleasures of consumption through sociability, sharing, friendship and the

collective adoption of identities and subjectivities with fellow enthusiasts who share the same social world. As Hilary Geoghagen (2013) has highlighted, enthusiasm at leisure and group events influences passions, performances and actions in space. The sociability of emotion at knitting events and festivals is one of happiness and generosity:

“You know, it’s such a nice experience; your face hurts from smiling all day after you’ve been to Unravel. I started knitting, personally, after attending Unravel. I don’t know how you can attend and not get ‘the bug’”

(Interview, Unravel Organisers, January, 2014)

“Hannah: Yeah, we run a few other festivals – but knitting is definitely the most relaxed and happy atmosphere of the three.

Annie: They’re a very generous community with each other.

Laura: Cool, so what makes that atmosphere?

Hannah: Yeah, I’m not sure. I think it’s about knitting itself. It seems with knitting everyone is really happy to share what they’re doing; they’re really happy and passionate about it. In other crafts it’s a bit more competitive and commercial maybe.”

(Interview, Unravel Organisers, January 2014)

“Time has been given freely and creative energy shared openly. Remarkable generosity and a spirit of goodwill has proudly prevailed and this makes amazing things happen.”

(Wool House, Campaign for Wool, 2013).

Indeed, ‘festivals are primarily about active participation in creating, celebrating and engaging with ideas of community identity and belonging’ (Duffy *et al*, 2011; 16). It is through the proximity of others of like-mind – whether real or imagined – that enthusiasm produces the ‘surfaces’ and ‘boundaries’ that enable the individual to identify as a group member (Geoghagen, 2013). At both the Knitting and Stitch Show and Unravel the sense of conviviality was palpable – the spaces became transformed by the (gendered) communities. At Alexandra Palace, to cope with demand the men’s toilets became women’s toilets. At various spaces in the festival

groups hung out together, exchanging experiences, knowledges and skills. There was a definite buzz at the festival that differed from the archetypal ‘coolness’ upon which geographies of buzz have concentrated (Currid, 2009). It was undeniable these spaces were mostly occupied by white, middle class women – one participant at the Knitting and Stitch show joked to me over lunch ‘that it was populated by the sensible shoe gang’. Some of the non-craft stalls at the Knitting and Stitch Show appealed to ‘stereotypes’ too – Cats Protection had a strong presence. But, these social co-ordinates of identity were only part of the scene. They mattered, but were paralleled by a more proximate identification as a knitter, discovering the latest trends and yarns, becoming inspired, feeling affirmation from fellow knitters. In this sense, as Geoghagen (2013: 43) puts it, ‘enthusiasm is a great leveller of hierarchies’. Within the the interviews with Warrington based working class women that I conducted, Sue was one of the few women that had attended a Knitting and Stitch Show. For her, the event provided a welcome break:

“The first time I went to Harrogate, I remember coming in one day when the knitting group had just started and saying to my friend Diane ‘I won’t be in next week; I’m going on a knitting holiday’. She said, ‘You’re going where? A knitting holiday? *A knitting holiday?* What are you going to do there?’. I said ‘Knit!’ So it was a whole weekend, and you went and had a lovely break and you went to the show and it was great. That’s how I found out about yarnbombing. And the next year, Diane came with me and she’s loved it. We go every year now.”

(Sue, Interview, October, 2013)

Sue is a full-time carer for her husband, who is long-term sick. For Sue, the Knitting and Stitch Show is a holiday, an opportunity to engage in spaces through her identity as a knitter, rather than to be carer, wife or mother.

The sense that these festivals and events are exceptional spaces, where one can prioritise one’s identification as a knitter, was more widely felt than by Sue alone. As signalled earlier, the temporariness of these events reflects a broader precarity to craft (Adamson, 2011); knitting indeed suffers from negative stereotyping which unhelpfully marginalises it as skilled practice (Newington, 2014). The festivals and events therefore appeal to knitters as a space where their craft consumption is taken

seriously, among like-minded individuals in a social world that is knowledgeable, creative and inspiring. To adopt Michel Maffesoli's terminology, knitting festivals and events have a 'neo-tribal' sensibility (Maffesoli, 1988).

One exemplification of this are the 'Best in Show' competitions held at most of these events. Best in Show competitions were steadfast features across the Unravel and Knitting and Stitch Show festivals. They offer participants the opportunity to submit their knitting to be judged competitively with other knitters. At the Knitting and Stitch Show in 2012 the Best in Show competition theme was 'The Knitted Village'. Knitters submitted various buildings, gardens, allotments and so on to be judged as part of their participation in the festival. Similarly, Unravel festival has, each year, also held a 'Best in Show' competition. Knitted objects are submitted and judged on their skill and creativity.



Figure 4.13: Knitted Village, The Knitting and Stitch Show, 2012. Author's own.



Figure 4.14: Prizewinning Fire Engine, Knitting and Stitch Show. Author's own.



Figure 4.15: Prizewinning Fire Engine, Unravel. Author's own.

The Knitted Village is more than just an example here; it symbolises a wider process that Best in Show epitomises. The landscape of these festivals is literally knitted by

its participants, whose efforts can be appreciated by other knowledgeable and skilled knitters. Coincidentally, at both Unravel and the Knitting and Stitch Show the same knitted fire station won ‘Best in Show’ (see Figures 4.14 and 4.15). I could not determine with certainty whether both were by the same knitter, and simply used the same pattern; it seems to be the same knitter but the submission for Unravel had been slightly embellished, but it was held four months after the Knitting and Stitch Show. The shared outcomes attest to the consistency of expectations in these competitions: of playfulness, colour, imagination and skill. It is not necessarily a *serious* competition – with objects often humorous, including gin poodles, whole knitted kennels, and knitted advent calendars and so on. But the Best in Show competitions are indicative of a wider blurring of consumption and production in these spaces, with one of the key aspects of their sociality being the display and affirmation of participants’ own knitted labours. Indeed, for some, the festivals as a whole work as a ‘Best in Show’, revolving around the giving and receiving of responses:

“I chatted with Anna and Rachel outside the festival. Anna was wearing the jumper she’d designed and knitted herself. As we chatted, a woman approached us: “Can I just say, I love the yoke on your jumper, it’s beautiful – that’s my kind of jumper”. Anna replied: “Thanks! You can buy the pattern at the stall just inside. I made it for Pom-pom magazine”. Rachel commented: “That’s what the festival’s all about isn’t it – checking out each other’s knitted clothes, what you’re wearing, what you’ve made. It’s like an extended ‘best in show.’”

(Unravel, Fieldnotes, March, 2014).

“I just love coming to these events, because you can see what everyone’s been knitting, because they wear their knits and they’re appreciated by the crowd, you know.” (Ethnographic Interview, Unravel Festival, March, 2014)

The practice of dressing up, and the wearing of clothing to signify identity and belonging to social groups, is well documented within social science. Goffman (1959; 300) identifies how individuals coordinate their behaviour through shared ‘etiquette, dress, deportment, gesture, intonation, dialect, vocabulary, small bodily

movements and automatically expressed evaluations concerning both the substance and details of life'. Knitting festivals and events offer embodied, visual, tactile, affective opportunity for knitters to perform and make social worlds through shared dress, craft knowledge and skill. For Rachel and Anna, the wearing of handknits was important and provided an opportunity to showcase skill and creativity – that could be judged by fellow knitters who appreciated the labour that goes into producing them. Throughout the interviews and the knitting groups in which I took part, knitters would complain that non-knitters did not appreciate the skill, time and labour that goes into producing a garment – as Jo Turney (2009) puts it, the ordinariness of knitting belies its skill. Knitting festivals provide an important opportunity to showcase craft knowledge through visual and tactile enthusiasm for knitted garments; and, in turn, this showcasing of knitted achievement is part of what establishes the neo-tribal sociality of belonging, both through self-presentation and through displaying the knowledge of how other's knitted garments were made (Geoghagen, 2013; Ahmed, 2008). The use of 'Best in Show' speaks to the particularly of the event and the performance of being a craft consumer in the production of craft festival/event space.

Warm Expertise and Crafty Spaces

So far, I have fleshed out the affective atmosphere at knitting festival and events, noting its production through the abundance of material stuff curated in these spaces; and I have highlighted the role of other non-human presences, especially sheep, who co-produce the moral, ethical, social and cultural geographies of these events. As I have begun to expand, the role of knitters as enthusiasts further shapes the space as a 'social world' through which knitters perform their identities through hand-knit clothing and participation in events such as 'Best in Show'. In this next section I want to develop this focus on the sociality of these events by exploring the ways that taking part in knitting at festivals involves affective bodies in crowds. Geographers have engaged with embodied practice, movement and 'corporeal capacities' at events and festivals more generally (Duffy et al, 2011; McCormack, 2008; Malbon, 1999), but the tendency has been to focus on situations that generate excitements, vitalities and liveliness. Less studied have been events characterised by slowness, or even stillness. I want to explore the ways that knitting festivals and

events offer moments of being together, but in so doing produce affective atmospheres with rhythmic bodies that are slow.

“I arrive at the Knitting and Stitch Show with Amy. Before entering the hall proper, we are in the atrium and there’s a mass of people at tables decorated with leaves, branches and bunting. I stop to observe the knitters for a brief moment, and somebody approaches me: “Do you want to join in? We’re knitting leaves”. Amy and I join a table and cast on a few stitches. The pattern requires us to knit a simple square of garter stitch, and then fold it over to make a ‘leaf’. We chat to the women we join at the table, who talk with anticipation about the day, sharing stories and where they’ve come from. A woman on the table next to me gets up with her friend: “Right, that’s me done – let me at those yarns!”

(Knitting and Stitch Show, Fieldnotes, October, 2013)

“Needing a break, I joined a bunting-knitting table sponsored by ‘Simple Knitting’ magazine. There were around ten women on the table, each knitting at different speeds. Some were friends already; some were keen enthusiasts helping others complete their bunting flag. It was easy to tell who was more experienced by the speed at which they knitted. The conversation ranged from discussing the yarns we were knitting with, to the various magazines and medias that knitters get their patterns and knowledge from. I said I didn’t subscribe to any magazines, and the knitter sat next to me pulled out an iPad from her bag – she showed me Mollie Makes, Selvage, and Simply Knitting magazine on her ‘newspaper’ app and talked me through the style and tone and what she likes and dislikes about each magazine. A few moments later, as I thanked the assistant for the receipt for my six month subscription which I placed in the free canvas bag for signing up, I wondered what had just happened”.

(Knitting and Stitch Show, Fieldnotes, March, 2013)

Having the opportunity to sit and knit is important to the rhythm and “feel” of knitting festivals and events. Some of these opportunities are organised by the festival or by stallholders at the events, and work to encourage consumption of

goods – magazines, yarns etc.. But equally, up for consumption at these events is the *sensory experience* of knitting or crocheting, having the opportunity to participate and connect with others to potentially shape shopping and craft practices. The time spent sitting with others is also about acquiring new skills at the events, an accumulation of tacit knowledge and know-how rather than goods per se. These spaces allow for the exchange of ‘warm expertise’ (Bakardijeva, 2005). ‘Warm experts’ are friendly, ‘ordinary’ people who share skills and competencies to make things seem doable. These senses of participation in a consumer world that is ordinary, achievable and doable encourage social, cultural and economic flows and movements around the festival.



Figure 4.16: Knitting Lounge, Unravel. Author's own.



Figure 4.17: Knitting workshops, Unravel. Author's own.



Figure 4.18: Knitting workshops, Knitting and Stitch Show, Author's own.

These spaces for pausing, sitting, knitting and chatting (see Figures 4.16, 4.17 and 4.18) encourage craft consumers to dwell, interact and feel part of a convivial community. Wool House had crochet, knitting and spinning activities that attendees could participate in ad-hoc. In a space that celebrated woollen materiality, these provided an opportunity to work with that material. In each case, the help of ‘warm experts’ made these material and creative projects accessible, ordinary and achievable. Unravel festival also made space for ‘knitting lounges’, which provided opportunities for knitters to work on their own projects, rest, and exchange information and ideas with other participants. Such spaces “shape the affectual particularities of the event as a site of consumption” (Miller, 2014; 23); even in the busy-ness (and business) of the festival there was spatial provision to appreciate the slowness of crafting practice. In the chance to sit with and chat to other attendees, these knitting lounges and workshop areas are also sites of connection for relations that may have been forged online, through social media, blogs and websites such as Ravelry (Gauntlett, 2011).

“We enter the exhibition hall. It’s busy. I look round taking in the room – quilts, knitting, crochet, and spinning wheels. A woman taps me on the arm: “Do you want to sit down and learn something? Can you knit”? I say that I dabble but I am still learning – I wouldn’t mind practising moss stitch. She pulls up a seat and shows me enthusiastically. As I finish casting on she tells me how she got into knitting from YouTube and then Ravelry. “Are you on Ravelry?” – I reply with my username. When I get home later that night she’s sent me a message about how great it was to meet today and hopefully we’ll chat on here soon.”

(Unravel, Fieldnotes, March, 2013)

These ad-hoc formations also relate to the sense of material abundance and excess that shapes the knitting festivals’ affectual atmospheres. Craft consumers are so enthusiastic about their products and materials they cannot wait to consume them at home and “by lunchtime, everyone is just sat down – knitting! They’ve got their new wool out, they’ve found somewhere to sit and they’re just going for it.” (Unravel Organisers, Interview, March, 2014). This is a highly visible indication of

the wider tendency in craft consumption to rework the spaces of production, retail and consumption. At knitting festivals and events, the geographies of point of purchase, consumption and production become blurred as consumers buy, use and make in situ.

Sites of Exclusion

I have argued so far that knitting festivals and events are convivial spaces characterised by enthusiasm, enchantment with things and materials, and participation. All of these characteristics shape these consumer spaces of knitting as sites of ‘alternative hedonism’ to mainstream consumer culture (Soper, 2007). Craft, skill, time, knowledge and investment are combined with consumer pleasures. However, as Campbell (2005) has argued for craft consumption more generally, it is important to recognise the broader social and cultural cartographies of such consumer cultures and spaces. The alternative hedonism of knitting consumption is most easily pursued by those with economic and social capital to explore alternatives. These required capitals are complex: they include money / purchasing power; but they also include relations to skill which are not confined to the sharing ethos of ‘warm expertise’; and they include diverse positionings in relation to the lifestyle connotations of alternative hedonism.

Let me start with that issue of skill. As well as free, ad-hoc and organic gatherings at knitting festivals, there are a range of skill classes that can be paid for. These classes habitually offer the learning of a technique or skill from ‘Beginner’s Crochet: Granny Square’ to ‘Knit a Napkin Ring: Take the Fear out of Double Pointed Needles’. Sometimes, these classes are unique to their facilitators, who are often relative ‘celebrities’ of the knitting and stitch world. For example, blogger and mender Tom of Holland provided ‘darning masterclasses’ at Unravel festival:

Hannah: Yeah, I think the workshops have grown really as visitor numbers have grown.

Annie: There’s a huge demand for them.

Hannah: If we could do more, people would want them, there’s just not enough time.

Annie: Yeah it's about accessing the people not just their techniques – so Tom, the darner for example. That's something we tried to do this year. Get new people in, do something different.

Laura: Are they quite oversubscribed then, the workshops?

Annie: Yeah, Tom's was the first one to sell out.

Hannah: The workshops are a good part of the show; to do something that's not just knitting as well.

(Interview with Unravel Organisers, January 2014)

As enthusiasts and craft consumers take their leisure time more seriously, and become more skilled and competent, their willingness (or need) to try more techniques and become more skilful becomes evident – in the case of Tom of Holland this transformation saw him become an 'expert' and online celebrity. In such a context, expertise is not just a resource that is mobilised in a sharing ethos, it can also perform hierarchies and senses of inclusion and exclusion. This can occur even when organisers hope for precisely the opposite:

"The exhibition hall is still filling up. I'm alone today. I notice a space with tables advertising to make knitted paper chains for festivals. I sit down and join in to chat to other knitters. There's a woman who's in charge and she explains what to do – how many stitches to cast on, how long etc. **We're watched by small crowds and the knitter-in-charge offers them a space at our table. One woman replies 'No thanks, I can sit and knit at home I didn't come here to do that in public today; that's not for me'.** After chit-chat about knitting and anti-consumerism it turns out the knitter-in-charge isn't actually employed by anyone, she just had a weekend ticket and after visiting yesterday realised she could come today and help other people out to make paper chains – there's no rules, it's just ad-hoc skill sharing."

(Knitting and Stitch Show, Fieldnotes, March, 2014)

"I took a seat in the entrance hall, watching visitors pass by - the couple next to me reflected on the exhibition - "It makes me think, I should just

save up for something luxurious that will last, rather than buying cheaply and often. Although, I do feel a bit of a failure – I can't knit at all."

(Wool House, Fieldnotes, March, 2014)

"I went to a talk on craft guilds the other day, and do you know not one of the speakers wore anything hand-knit. It's like, practise what you preach, know what I mean? Less saying, more doing" (Ethnographic Interview, Unravel, March, 2014)

In these woolly, material, knitted worlds the ability to make and craft is necessary to participate and the tropes of care, love, skill, craftsmanship and participation can make the non-craft consumer not only 'out of place' (Cresswell, 1996) but actively 'othered' as uncaring, uncreative, duped. The possession of levels of craft skill becomes a morally charged issue; it is a matter of being a 'good' knitter in more than one sense. Whilst the predominant affective register of these knitting festivals may be characterised by enthusiasm, openness, pleasure, 'warmth', my own research fieldnotes also identified currents of unease, discomfort, and exclusion.

And of course, the sorts of counter-currents documented above were to be found at the festivals themselves. More generally, when thinking about the broader social geographies of knitting, these festivals are somewhat self-populating. They draw in those whom they attract. Ultimately, though, there are people who are invisible in such spaces, enthusiastic knitters who do not attend events and festivals, whose crafting is distanced (but not entirely disconnected) from the kind of knitting scene and consumer culture that these festivals manifest. As explained in Chapter Three, a desire to escape from the boundaries of that consumer culture led me to work with a number of 'lone knitters' and working-class elderly women in my home town of Warrington. For example, knitters such as Joan, whose knitting I explore in more detail in Chapter Five:

Laura: So how do you choose the wool you use, Joan?

Joan: I normally just go off the pattern, you know. I buy the wool in bulk, you know and if you've got some left over she usually lets you take it back and change it. Most wool shops used to let you take it away, and take it back

if you didn't need it and she does let you do that, definitely. This wool here (picks up wool) is five pound a ball. Some wool, it's just so expensive.

Joan: I've noticed now that there's lots of crochet stuff in the shops, but you can't get patterns and I've looked, I've really tried.

Laura: What about the Internet? Have you had a look?

Joan: Oh no, I wouldn't know where to start – I just get my patterns from Widnes Market, I'm happiest doing that.

Joan: I used to get Stitchcraft Magazines, once a month. They used to have good patterns. But you just can't find them now. My friend had a crochet top, it was really lovely; I looked for a pattern but I couldn't find one at all! I thought maybe I could make one up in my head, as a final resort.

(Interview with Joan, August 2013)

For Joan, her knitting, crochet and craft creativity is limited by access to materials. The vibrant social worlds of knitting festivals are beyond Joan's imagination despite her enthusiasm. As Bev Skeggs argues, women's access and entry to leisure space can alter depending on social position; researchers need to point to the potentialities of space for enabling some groups access and entitlement whilst denying it to others (Skeggs, 1999; 229). Joan enjoyed social interaction at Widnes Market, North West England, which runs a more traditional wool stall. When Joan talked me through her yarn stash it was clear she rarely used 100% wool due to cost, and favoured acrylic fibre, as it is affordable and accessible via the market. Joan relied on Widnes Market for patterns, and lamented her lack of progress in keeping up with trends given that she mostly can only work from older patterns.



Figure 4.19: Vintage Patterns at Unravel Festival, Author's own.

I thought of Joan, at Unravel festival especially, given that the festival cultivated a more retro, vintage vibe. Campbell (2005) notes that collecting is an important part of craft consumption; and ultimately knitters and crocheters are keen collectors and even archivists (online and offline) through their accumulation of materials to their stash (Stalph, 2009). But if these knitting festivals and events work as sites of accumulation and on-going maintenance of archives, for some, economic, gender and class geographies limit the accumulation of these materials and their participation. Joan was not going to Unravel, though the patterns she enjoyed using did feature, as part of a retro aesthetic.

In Summary

In this chapter I have variously addressed the space, site and event of craft consumption through the case study of knitting festival and events. I have explored the affectual atmosphere of events and the materials, objects, people and non-humans who co-produce them. Craft consumption is often framed through doing that takes place at home; it is an action that has anti-consumerist and alternative consumption ethics. In focusing on the *doing* at home, academics exploring craft consumption have neglected these emergent spaces and events that celebrate the consumer culture of knitting and the ‘raw materials’ of craft consumption (Campbell, 2005; Watson, 2008). By engaging with the performance and experience of these events I have hopefully illustrated the hedonistic potentialities of consuming differently through knitting, drawing out the positive qualities of abundance, warmth, sharing, and creative making. However, I also sounded a note of caution, pointing out counter-currents of exclusion and hierarchy within and beyond these events. These speak to a broader need to both recognise and go beyond the contemporary celebrations of knitting as alternative craft consumption. We need to attend to a diversity of knitters and knitting practices. That is an argument I maintain and develop in the next chapter, as I turn to consider more directly the socio-material connections made through knitting.

Chapter Five

Connecting: friendship, care and the feeling of doing

“We’ve tried to reproduce community feeling and spirit – you know working on things together”

(Interview with Stoke Newington knitters, January 2014)



Figure 5.1: Knitted Stoke Newington, Author's own.

In 2013 members of a knitting group in Stoke Newington knitted and crocheted a model of the grassy common in the centre of their community. The ‘Knitted Common’ took months to make, twice-weekly meetings to design and make things together, and evenings spent alone to ‘get the job done’. On its completion it was put on display at Hackney Museum as part of an exhibition entitled ‘Side by Side’; this exhibition explored ‘what it means to live in Hackney’. The project is emblematic of various ‘community’ projects produced by knitting groups – from knitted ‘yellow jersey’ bunting made to celebrate the Tour De France passing through Yorkshire in June 2014 to knitted birds made to explore climate change in Scotland (see Hawkins and Marsden, 2014).

Stoke Newington Common Knitted and similar community projects, then, represent an important facet of the ‘burgeoning popularity’ of knitting (Turney, 2009; Minehan and Cox, 2008; Wallace, 2013) – ‘group participation, inclusive attitudes and a sense of pride in making something by hand have rewarded a generation who never previously learnt to knit’ (Black, 2012; 155). Community craft projects also reflect the contemporary valorisation of collaboration and participation through craft: “workmanship-like exchanges between individuals and across disciplinary boundaries that are freely entered into, and that through joint endeavour leave one or both sides significantly changed” (Ravetz *et al*, 2013). For David Gauntlett (2011; 161), who coined the notable phrase ‘Making is Connecting’: “working together with people on shared projects, is not merely pleasant-but-optional ‘icing on the cake’ of individuals’ lives, but is absolutely essential for personal well-being and for a healthy, secure, trust-worthy society.” For Richard Sennett (2012) projects and co-operation enhance the quality of social experiences - the physical gestures of working together give life to social relations. Crafts appear as a pleasurable and social activity that embrace productive forms of leisure and that stand in opposition to the time-saving, alienating promises of consumer culture (Nathanson, 2013; 104).

Geographers have long engaged with ‘communities’ that are brought together by enthusiasm, shared passion and co-production in various creative contexts – art, gardening (Adams *et al*, 2013, Bhatti *et al*, 2009), clubbing (Malbon, 1999), for example. Knitting, though, has its own distinctive qualities. It is a craft bound up in practices and spaces of ‘care’: from its histories of care-giving and provisioning; to contemporary social spaces of knitting as ‘care’ for the body and self through its therapeutic capacities; and care for others and communities through its participatory, collaborative and social capacities. For David Gauntlett (2011: 106), to make is to feel “happy”:

“Happiness is about family, community and well-being. It cannot be determined by a certain level of material comfort. Instead, it stems from having meaningful connections with others, and meaningful things to do. These (making) projects are especially valuable if they are not contained at

the individual level but involve some form of sharing, co-operation or contribution to other people's well-being".

In this chapter I respond to such claims for the social and emotional efficacy of making in general and knitting more specifically. Drawing in particular on my empirical research with selected knitting groups as well as with lone-knitters (as outlined in Chapter Three), the chapter's argument is progressed through five main sections. First, I focus on how knitting groups create spaces of friendship and care. Focusing in particular on my fieldnotes from the Hammerknit group in west London and the Carers U Knitted group in Warrington, I trace through how these groups bring people together as knitters with shared practice, and forge spaces that offer contrasts to and consolations from wider social milieu. I consider how the knitting done is often directed at friendship and family networks, through the gifting of completed work as presents. I also consider how these groups relate to wider social differences: at times, having their 'proxemic socialities' (Maffesoli, 1996) coloured by them; at times having their feminist ethic of care enhanced through a 'care-full' coming together in difference. Second, I then turn to look in more depth at the material practices of knitting that constitute the groups' collective life. I explore how material craft practices and exchanges produce the knitting group as a 'friendly place' (Bowlby, 2011). I also trace out how the knitted objects produced can lend further agency to the groups' ethics of care, taking the example of the 'twiddlemuffs' made for dementia patients by the Carers U Knitted group.

In the third section of the chapter, I extend this analysis of care through a focus on the role of knitting in caring for the self. A range of popular commentaries, and indeed scientific health research, has emphasised the contributions that knitting can make to personal well-being. In part this stems from the caring social connections and friendships that knitting can foster, however I argue that it also relates to the transformations to one's sense of self in the world produced through the embodied doing of knitting. In the fourth section of the chapter I turn more directly to the places where knitting groups meet. I argue that these places play a constitutive role in the practice of knitting and in the 'connecting' that it does. I further suggest that knitting has complex geographies that combine a need for space of one's own with an intersectional politics of spatial transgression. Finally, in the fifth part of the

chapter I draw on my empirical research with ‘lone knitters’ to develop an argument that knitting connects even when not undertaken in groups or in public spaces. In so doing, I also confront the tendency of popular accounts of a collective, public knitting scene to ignore or ‘other’ the domestic and familial knitting associated with older generations of women.

Friendships: making, maintaining and participating

I begin this section by focusing on the first knitting group I attended during my research – which was a weekly group in West London, which I will refer to by its pseudonym, Hammerknit. This group met in a local café on the high street at 6pm on one day each week; this was to allow people to pop by post-work or on their commute home. I found the group from online knitters network Ravelry – the group is active on Ravelry, using the site to check who’ll be attending knitting group that week and sharing links for events and festivals. During my search for a knitting group I contacted (and attempted to attend) various knitting groups in my local area only to find that they had folded completely or were on indefinite hiatus. This felt like a ‘spectre’ of the boom of the ‘stitch and bitch movement’ in the early 2000’s (Minehan and Cox, 2007; Parkins, 2004); but also added kudos to groups such as the Hammerknit that were not only still running but well attended.

The group attendance at Hammerknit varied – some days, there were twelve women, other days there were three. There were definitely ‘regulars’ that were a familiar face and these were often more long-term residents in a city that is characterized by mobility and movement. In truth, whilst a regular, I did not become one of the leading figures of the group: this was partly due to my own positionality as a researcher, which led me to want to see how things developed rather than actively seek to lead them; but it also reflected some in terms of my different identity to most of the group, especially felt through class. For example, on one occasion I attended the knitting group on the same day that I had learnt my friend had given birth to the baby (my god-daughter) for whom I was knitting a blanket in the previous few weeks. Rather than congratulations on this news, I felt exposed to various moral judgements on my friend being too young and questioning how she was going to support herself “unmarried, at 23”. More

generally, I felt different as the only working class ‘northerner’ in the group. This aside, on the whole I enjoyed attending the knitting group and as I illustrate in this chapter, often these friendships and social relations rested on our identities as knitters – skills, expertise, material enthusiasm - and not necessarily wider subjectivities and identities. But I am also mindful, as Bowlby (2011; 618) states, that there is an “uncomfortable possibility that the necessarily particularistic relationships of care involved in friendships may also help to maintain social inequalities and social exclusions” (Bowlby, 2011; 618).

In this section, I hope to explore the possibilities of the knitting group as a space of friendships and care. Geographers have tended to neglect the intrapersonal relations of friendship by romanticizing ‘community’ and ‘neighbourhood’, which, by virtue of their existence in the first place, imply cohesion (Bunnell *et al*, 2012; 496). Friendship is a key aspect of sociability, solidarities and communal belonging – it can provide informal care and support that is shaped by shared experiences and activities (Bowlby, 2011). Various material practices, and the sharing of practical help, can shape friendship; for example DIY, shopping, pet care etc. (Bowlby, 2011). These mundane everyday activities are spaces of bodily co-presence and whilst there is growing attention on virtual spaces of friendship (which absolutely inform the space of knitting groups in some instances) paying attention to the embodied being together of friends illustrates their power as affective and emotional worlds to which friendship is the ‘social glue’ (Bunnell *et al*, 2012). In this chapter I will reflect on knitters’ own comments about the group as a space of friendship, but I will also examine the routines and rituals which shaped the space as a ‘friendly place’ (Bowlby, 2012).

“What are you knitting this week?” - introducing selves via projects

“As customary to the beginning of knitting group we take it in turns to ask each person what they were knitting. This week, Tilly took on the task and in turn around the table each person introduced their project informally. Anna was knitting socks; every week since I began attending knitting group she has been knitting socks – they are her favourite project because she can do them without concentrating, and she’s become so well known for her

sock knitting that family and friends supply her with material for her to make them for gifts etc. Anna has told me on occasion that she lives unhappily in London – she never planned on living in the city and finds it difficult to make friends and stay happy midweek until the weekends when she often visits family and her partner. She attends knitting group every week, and she makes socks because they are such a portable project; she can work on them at lunchtime in the office, on public transport and at knitting group. For Anna, it's always a conversation starter or if there's no conversation she can carry on making socks without feeling weird in social situations.” (Hammerknit Fieldnotes, December, 2013).

“It's 6.45 and knitting group has been in ‘full-swing’ for a while. Ella has just arrived and she's flustered and “ready to take it out on the needles” after a busy day at work. By day, Ella works as a barrister. She's making a colourful shawl from a self-patterning yarn and as she gets to work she sighs with relief: “It's just really great to work with colour and be around yarn-minded people after spending all day in my black robes”. Ella joins the group to little fan-fare; she sits down and one member leans over and says, “How much have you done on your shawl since last week?” – in a sense, this is a ‘How are you, how's your week been?’ but it's much more subtle and besides, after a busy day, I imagine Ella can't be bothered with more formal catch ups – as she said when she arrived ‘she's ready to knit’.” (Hammerknit Fieldnotes November, 2013).

The ‘casting on’ of the knitting group each week was signalled by ‘going around the table’ to introduce informally the project a member was working on that week. Often members had been to the group before, so this introduction was more of an ‘update’ on a project. But for ‘new members’ or less frequent members it was a way of re-connecting and establishing a shared interest or knowledge. In November 2013 I returned to the knitting group after a few weeks ‘hiatus’ whilst researching in Warrington. One member asked me, “What were you knitting last time? I remember projects not people”. Knitting projects acted as ‘props’ to socialise with; on occasion they worked to render more personal information less visible or important. I did not have to explain my ‘hiatus’ to the group, much like Ella did not have to

explain her lateness to knitting group after a busy day – I was back, with my project, and that is what mattered. There was a sense of anonymity within the group produced by flexible and informal membership; there was no feeling of ‘burden’ or ‘responsibility’ to attend Hammerknit. Members might not attend for weeks or months – but on their return they would be remembered by the project they were last knitting. For Anna, the knitting group was important in the context of her unhappiness at living in the city. It was difficult for Anna to make friendships because of her own (and others’) economic and social mobilities that characterise urban space. However, within the knitting group this mobility and fragility is part of its character and allowed Anna to experience friendship, warmth, and support without too much effort or burden on either side – her identity as a brilliant sock-knitter was more important than her identity as an anxious and uncomfortable twenty-something office worker; her material skill became a social skill. As Conradson (2003; 508) states, care is the “proactive interest of one person in the well-being of another – the articulation of that interest in practical ways”. In the space of the knitting group the sharing of craft knowledge and interest in skill translated into a sense of care and support in more subjective and emotional senses, but this was a care characterised by informality.

This sense of informality and ‘no-pressure’ friendship was apparent at a gift exchange. In the weeks leading up to Christmas in 2013 the group had welcomed new members and new faces and it was decided that in order to celebrate Christmas members attending the next meeting should bring a small gift each for a ‘lucky dip secret Santa’. The act of gifting to one another re-affirms social relations and friendships (Mauss, 2002); in this instance it also reaffirmed the group identities as crafty consumers (Campbell, 2005). The gifts all related to knitting – yarn, stitch markers, notebooks for writing patterns, darning mushrooms and the like. On opening the gifts and on the ‘revealing’ of secret Santa it was apparent that not everybody knew each other’s names to say thank-you – despite many members attending the group for several weeks or months. It could have been awkward, but it was humorous and as one person noted ‘I’m happy to be better known for my stranded colourwork’ (this refers to the use of more than one colour yarn whilst knitting a pattern). In short, Hammerknit functioned as a convivial, social space that

provided small instances of mundane kindness and friendship in the urban everyday (Hall and Smith, 2014).

Managing 'knit for lists'

So far I have suggested that knitting groups are a site of friendship and a space of care; that they have a distinctive temporality; and that they provide a context for creative, performative subjectivities based on embodied doing and experiences that are both everyday and special. These spaces are about routine and about 'getting on with material production' in the event; which makes them distinctive in the context of lived experiences outside of the group. At the same time, I do not wish to deny the conviviality and exchange of personal lives and stories at knitting groups. In particular, this was brought to the fore in discussion of for whom projects were being knitted (i.e. 'Who's that for?'). In her article 'Making Love with Needles: Knitted Objects as Signs of Love?', Jo Turney (2012) suggests: "knitting has historically been associated with both familial and romantic love; of time spent thinking of someone whilst making, with the made object an expression of the sacrifice of time, of thoughtfulness and the embodiment of feminine 'virtues' of caring and nurturing". Members of the knitting groups that I attended on the whole subscribed to this understanding of hand-made objects signifying love and care:

"If someone's taken the trouble to knit you something, they wouldn't do it for nothing ... with anything hand-made, if someone gives you something and they've spent time, when they could have gone to the shop but they haven't... they've made it specifically for you. So if I was going to make you something, like a scarf, I might make it in yellow, because the skirt you've got on today is yellow so I know you'd like it. There's something about that... it makes the person feel nice or special, that you've gone to the effort to do it specifically for them. I mean, I've got a friend, she's 93, and I crocheted her a blanket last year, just granny squares, and she has it on a chair in her house and she puts it on her shoulders at night to keep warm. It's just nice when I go in there and it's being used." (Interview with Diane, Carer's U Knitted, November, 2013)

The knitting groups provided a space to discuss the care and maintenance of friendships, networks and spaces outside of the group under the umbrella term 'knit for list'. The 'knit for list' was the mental (sometimes material – at Christmas etc.) list knitters kept of people they wanted to, or planned to, knit for. According to Louise Crewe (2011; 29), "lists catalogue matter and ideas, objects and intentions. They reveal unexpected significance in unlikely things and tell us far more about ourselves and others than we might imagine". Lists are always transitory, negotiated in practice, and reflect the more than rational or economic values that are produced by the messiness of materiality, memory, emotions and our complicated relationship to 'stuff' (Miller, 2010). The 'knit for list' revealed the wider geographies and relationships of members of the knitting group and the complex practices and spaces of care, love and friendship they negotiated in producing knitted items for others. As Hall and Jayne (2015) suggest, very little is known about what happens with/to the 'things' when they leave the sewing (or knitting) circle – not just materially, but also on an emotional and embodied level. The maintenance of the 'knit for list' during knitting groups provided a space to learn about the multi-biographies invested in and of objects by both the maker and recipient. It also affirmed the friendships within the group by shared understanding, appreciation or frustration at the use (or not) of knitted objects made within the group.

Whilst it has long been acknowledged that our consumption habits are shaped by love and relationships (Miller, 1989, Miller, 2009, Gregson, 2007), there has been a lack of engagement with the *production* and crafting of objects intentionally created with love, comfort and friendship in mind. For Turney (2012; 310), the assumption that knitting is necessarily more caring than other forms of production or consumption is problematic: 'the intention of the knitter, their thoughts, feelings, and emotions, demonstrated through the period spent knitting, may not be adequately communicated or received by the recipient'. This was illustrated by the removal or re-shuffling of people on the 'knit-for-list', who were often removed for lack of appreciation of the significance of a knitted object. A member of Hammerknit, Hannah, complained that her brother was taken off her 'knit for list' because he never wore the hats she made for birthdays and Christmas – her sister-in-law was added to the list for wearing and 'appreciating' these neglected hats. For

Hammerknit member Ella, the removal of her mother-in-law from her 'knit for list' reflected the breakdown of their relationship:

"Ella is discussing knitting a shawl for her mother-in-law this Christmas. However recently their relationship had become strained following a remark by Ella's mother-in-law that 'knitting was a mindless and boring hobby that any idiot can do'. Since then, Ella has taken her off the 'knit for list' and added her to the "people I wouldn't knit for even if they were bald from chemo' list" (Hammerknit Fieldnotes, October 2012).

Knitting groups are marked not only by the making and maintenance of items but the making and maintenance of friendships. Similarly, for Richard Sennett (2011; 219) 'the process of making and repairing inside a workshop connect to the social life outside of it'. This is not to suggest that knitters are better at social life, but that the practices, processes and techniques used within 'craft spaces' reflect the competencies and practices that produce, maintain and repair social life. Focusing on family life, Miller (2009; 31) discusses "the artisanal form of love, care and devotion, performed with such subtle grace, creativity and imagination that persons become objects of care and objects become subjects of relationships, blending imperceptibly with each other in the overall fullness and artistry of lives". In the course of my own research, by engaging with the material production and object biographies of knitted items made during knitting group the biographies and geographies of friendships and care-relationship were brought to the fore. Thinking about forms of 'social repair and maintenance' may be problematic in some contexts (who 'needs' repair, why must that repair be done, for whose usage etc.); but thinking about the on-going social 'making and mending' of friendships highlights spaces, such as knitting groups, which provide a site of everyday kindness and conviviality (Hall and Smith, 2014; Amin, 2009). It also speaks to the messy relational, material, emotional and affectual practices of craft, friendship and caring in knitting groups.

During the Q&A of an event that celebrated ‘knitting communities’ in urban environments, a member of the audience asked: “This is great – but what about the northern experience in the UK? What about working class women?” This resonated with me for personal and political reasons and this ‘neglected’ context was one that I felt it important to explore. These contemporary knitting communities are often perceived as sites of classed ‘personal pleasure, leisure and luxury’ (Turney, 2009) – they are sites of choice and mobility. As Yvette Taylor (2011) puts it, middle class women are more likely to be recognised as actively investing in themselves, their landscape, and less likely to be ‘fixed’ by a classing gaze. The question during the Q&A made me eager to research in my hometown of Warrington in the North West. In particular, I was eager to engage with a knitting group that was increasingly visible in the local press there – Carers U Knitted¹¹. I did not pursue this avenue of work to re-enforce classed boundaries via assumptions about the group’s character, but rather to explore specific place based communities and ‘creativity’ outside of a metropolitan context such as London (Warren and Gibson, 2011).

The Carers U Knitted group was started around the existing membership of the Carers’ Centre in Warrington. The Centre is a service for carers ‘who without payment help or support a relative, child, neighbour or friend who because of illness, disability, frailty or addiction is unable to manage alone’. The support offered is to ‘enable carers to maintain a balance between their caring responsibilities and life outside of caring, whilst enabling the person they support to be a full and equal citizen’. The group has a relatively consistent and loyal membership and took place once a week between 10 am – 2pm at the Carers’ Centre. This four-hour window for the knitting group provides time for members to manage enjoyment of project work, with time for tea breaks and relaxation. It also means that people can arrive or leave at times that suit their routines and responsibilities. In some respects this echoes the rhythm and routine of Hammerknit – though the ethic of informal care is complicated in Carers U Knitted given the formalised caring responsibilities these knitters are engaged with outside of the group (and indeed, must be involved with in order to take part in the group).

¹¹ The name has not been changed at the request of the group; members’ names have been changed.

“Well I lost my partner two years ago and it’s been very difficult, and you sort of sit at home and knit, but you’re just looking at four walls aren’t you – so to come here and knit, was very good for me. I don’t even know what we’re called; is it ‘Carers U Knitted’? – It’s good, we never talk about the people we’re caring for, sometimes something pops up, or if we’ve left the centre for a birthday lunch, but at knitting group we basically don’t talk about what’s going on in our lives. You’re just thinking of other things, you come out of the house, you might not be feeling good, but you get here, have a cup of tea, and there are people helping out and projects to get stuck into. It’s a good feeling”.

(Interview with Barbara of Carers U Knitted November, 2013).

The disclosure of personal information is usually recognised as a key element for friendship but tasks and jobs associated with context can provide a space to produce and maintain friendship in ways that are socially and emotionally distinctive (Cronin, 2014). For Barbara, the project work and tasks provide a site of ‘doing’ friendship. According to Conradson (2003; 453) “care is woven into the fabric of particular spaces and communities”. As Sue, initial instigator of the knitting group, put it: “the thing is, we’re all carers here, we know what it’s like to be caring, it doesn’t need to be said” (Interview, November, 2013). There was, then, an implicit understanding of people’s wider responsibilities outside of knitting group; this could be left unspoken but was clearly understood. For Diane, she felt there were more possibilities to meet ‘new people’ she would not normally socialise with:

“It brings you together, people from lots of different backgrounds. Sometimes, I go to another group on a Tuesday and some of them ladies are posh and they’re doing their thing, and I wouldn’t normally be with them but we are together and we talk. Same here, I’ve met people I wouldn’t normally, and you do talk to people.”

(Diane, Carers U Knitted, Interview, November, 2013)

The geographies of care and friendship in knitting groups can thus extend into a potential for meaningful encounter between differences. These groups have a ‘quiet politics of being together’. According to Askins (2015; 473), “Meaningful

encounters are also about how people come to recognise simultaneous similarity, developing new relations that shift pre-existing stereotypes through some appreciation or experience of connection or commonality”. I put forward a short story that provides an insight into the potential of knitting groups to bring diverse people together through sameness, as knitters, and thus provide opportunity to learn about difference:

“We’re all sat round, working on sewing buttons to the Christmas Trees. Diane rushes in, and shouts: “Tal, our Anna has just come in the building and she’s bringing her boyfriend Dan, just wanted to warn you”. Tal puts down her knitting and puts on a beanie hat that’s been rested on the arm of her chair. Dan arrives, and leaves a few minutes later to head to town. Afterwards, Diane says: “Sorry, did I do the right thing, telling you about Dan, ‘Tan? I’m still learning about your religion.” ‘Tan reassures Diane animatedly and thanks her, “Yeah, yeah, no problem.”

(Fieldnotes, Carers U Knitted, October, 2013)

“The twiddlemuffs are knitted, and adorned with zips, ribbons and buttons for patients to ‘twiddle with’ and keep occupied. Taslima has been attending knitting group for weeks and can speak very little English. Taslima has taken the lead in sewing zips onto the twiddlemuffs; she does a very good job. It’s taken a while but the group is slowly learning more about Taslima and her family. Last week many members attended the wedding reception of her sister. The group are talking animatedly about their first experience of an ‘Asian wedding’. As they retell me the story about the event, they run everything past Taslima to confirm they’re ‘telling it correctly’. Taslima clearly appreciates their checking and evident care to get things right and show respect.” (Fieldnotes, Carers U Knitted, October, 2013).

My wider suggestion, then, is that knitting groups are shaped by a feminist ethic of care. As I have illustrated above, this is often implicit and the friendships and feelings of support thereby generated vary in character. Knitting together in groups creates a space apart from other realms of life, whether those are characterised by urban anomie, career and professional pressures, or caring responsibilities for loved ones. In knitting groups, shared practice creates a social commonality. Of course,

this commonality as knitters is not hermetically sealed off from wider social differentiations. At times these intrude in unwelcome ways, as with my own discomfort over what I saw as classed norms and judgements at Hammerknit, which always left me feeling both commonality with and distance from the wider group. At other times, these social differentiations enhanced the sense of ‘coming together in difference’, as with Taslima’s membership of Carers U Knitted (and perhaps, for all I know, with how other Hammerknit members felt about having a minoritised northern, working class woman in their midst!).

Sharing material, sharing skill: transforming the social with yarn.

So far, I have explored the geographies of friendship and care performed through knitting groups. I have suggested that knitting groups are successful through their informality and anonymity, which allows for multiple subjectivities and identities shaped around knitting. I now wish to focus more directly on the material craft practices and exchanges within the groups, drawing out how these micro-politics produce the knitting group as a ‘friendly place’ (Bowlby, 2011).

Geographers have long recognised how certain groups, crowds and ‘communities’ take shape through the sharing of materialities, certain expertise and skills (Gregson and Crewe and 2003; Jupp, 2007; Askins and Pain, 2011; Geoghagen, 2013; Hall, 2013; Hall and Jayne, 2015). Focusing on the creative arts, Ed Hall (2013; 250) has discussed the “intense, embodied and emotional engagement with fleshy and natural materials—touching, singing, squeezing, shaping, cutting—producing change both in the materials and in the physical and emotional state of the person”. Craft is, at essence, a process of transformation - of materials, human competencies and spaces. As David Gauntlett (2011) and others (see Ravetz et al, 2013) have identified, this makes craft a space of possibility, change, sustained engagement and collaboration. As I have begun to introduce, the materialities of making and working on a project also make it possible for friendships and social relationships to develop by establishing identities based on skill and shared practice. More than this, having a project ‘on-the-go’ provided a way for people to be together but withdrawn if necessary. Sometimes the affective atmosphere of a group setting can overwhelm for a variety of reasons (if there are strong personalities in the group,

you're having a bad day, you want to get out of the house but don't feel like talking) - but having a project to work on provided a means to withdraw, experience 'flow' alone, whilst still being in a social setting. Knitting groups provide quite distinctive settings for both being with other people and for focusing on oneself. They are spaces of both collaboration and contemplation.

At Hammerknit, knitters mostly worked on individual rather than group projects. As I have suggested earlier in the chapter, this allowed for identities to be formed around project work rather than necessarily personal lives. On the whole, the women that attended Hammerknit were keen craft consumers and actively attended festivals, events and took part in online forums and networks such as Ravelry. They developed their social capital from attending knitting groups and also being part of the visible knitting 'scene'. This meant that their skills, patterns and materials were contemporary and shaped by various inspirations on-line and off-line. On an almost weekly basis materials were shared across the table: magazines with post-it notes to mark pages of interest, craft materials, patterns and website links.

“When Harriet arrived, Ella handed-over a copy of ‘The Knitter’ which featured Tom of Holland’s darning techniques. Harriet was really grateful and excitedly flicked through the mending diagrams in the magazine. Anna was equally enthused by Tom’s mending as she glanced over Harriet’s shoulder (given that she makes so many socks). Harriet thought it fantastic to hear Anna so eager to mend and wrote herself a reminder to bring her spare darning mushroom to the next knitting group: “It’s an absolute must for mending, I’d be glad to see my spare going to a good home.””.
(Hammerknit fieldnotes, November, 2012)

In this sense, the knowledge, skills and materials of the group shaped not just the group atmosphere but also wider craft and consumption practices. In the case documented in the fieldnotes above, this was by the circulation of knowledge and materials about repair and mending. In so doing, the social life of the knitting group and the material objects made within them were extended, strengthened and given greater value (Crewe, 2013; DeSilvey and Ryan, 2013).

During fieldwork, I also attended a six week 'learn to knit' knitting class at the Mary Ward Centre, London.¹² Mary Ward is an adult education centre in Central London and each week twelve 'students' met to learn to knit and crochet. For the first lesson we were encouraged to discuss our 'goal projects' – for the group, this ranged from jumpers to scarves to baby cardigans. My goal was to make a traditional tea cosy. The first lesson I attended I wore a purple dress - an inconsequential detail ordinarily. However, over the course of learning to knit I sat next to Frances who had recently learnt to use a computer and was enjoying looking for future knitting projects. Each week Frances brought me a new tea-cosy pattern she thought I might like and it always included the colour purple. These instances of kindness and generosity not only exemplified the importance of customisation and personalisation to knitters pursuing their craft, but also how the sharing of materials and patterns shaped friendships within the knitting group.

“Oh yeah, there's something nice about knowing you've helped somebody else learn something, and you've learnt something. As long as you have some experience with knitting you will do something different to somebody else. It's not always about being the most experienced. It is give and take. You know even if it's “anyone got any scissors, or wool?”. At the moment we're all walking around with green wool for these Christmas trees, and it's like “anyone got any some other green wool”. It's sharing, sharing material, knowledge, and sharing friendship.”

(Diane Interview, Carers U Knitted, November 2013).

The sharing of materials and skills helped to maintain reciprocal relationships within the group, and the successful dynamic of the knitting groups I attended depended on this degree of reciprocity, even if this was unequal in terms of craft skill. Small gestures such as passing over scissors or identifying colour preferences and sharing certain yarns helped create positive social relations and reinforce the possibilities of material transformation in social encounters. In Eleanor Jupp's (2007) research on community groups in Stoke-on-Trent, she concluded that practices of nurturing and care for other members of the groups, and material micro-interactions (for example,

¹² The Mary Ward Settlement, after which the Mary Ward Centre is named, aimed to provide educational opportunities and skill learning in 'the hundred pleasures and opportunities that fall mainly to the rich' (Mary Ward Centre, 2014).

making cups of tea or cooking lunch together), helped to generate personal and collective senses of achievement. These practical tasks provided a physical output for the emotional and affectual practices of care and friendship.



Figure 5.2: Knitted Christmas trees, Carers U Knitted. Author's own.



Figure 5.3: Knitted Christmas Trees made by Carers U Knitted from October to December 2013.

Author's own.

The Hammerknit group was based on bringing individual projects into a group setting. In contrast, the Carers U Knitted group involved working on one project or similar projects together. During my research I observed and helped the group make Twiddlemuffs and also Christmas decorations for the carers' centre in which the group was based.

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Twiddlemuff instructions

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<http://www.KnittingOnCircularNeedles.com>

1. Materials

- This muff pattern is perfect for using up left over and odd balls of wool.
- Needles: 8mm circular, (I preferred to use 6.5mm straight needles).

2. Directions

Cuff:



- Cast on 40 stitches using 2 strands of double knitting wool, (you can also use 1 strand of chunky wool).
- Work in stocking stitch (knit a line pearl a line) for 11 inches.

Muff Body:

- Continuing with stocking stitch and using up oddments of various textures of wool ie: chunky, mohair, ribbon.
- Until work measures 23 inches.
- Cast off.

3. Decoration and finishing

- Now is the time if you want to decorate the muff body with beads, flowers, zips, loops etc.
- Neatly join side sides together with pearl side facing you.
- Turn inside out.
- Push the cuff up inside the muff body
- Neatly sew together the two ends as pictured above.



Thank you for your support!

Figure 5.4: Twiddle Muff Instructions, shared by Carers U Knitted.

Twiddlemuffs are knitted 'cuffs' that both hands fit into and thus provide warmth, but they are also adorned with various zips, buttons, ribbons and so on. They are

designed for anxious dementia patients to tug on or play with, which is purported to help a patient feel calm and ‘comforted’. What they were making mattered to the knitters in the group. It was important to them that their knitted efforts were ‘useful’ for other carers, and people *needing* care. This was valued as a part of the ‘feel good’ factor of their work.

“I’ve never knitted for myself. My husband keeps saying “Oh, you’ll be making me a jumper soon” and I say, “Give over, maybe one day, maybe a little scarf or something.” At the moment, I’m quite happy doing what I’m doing, I’m enjoying it, and I don’t want to take something on and not enjoy it and be worried about finishing it.”

(Kate, Carers U Knitted Interview, December, 2013)

The knitters that were part of Carers U Knitted did not arrive at the group with an existing passion for knitting. Rather, the knitting group was a new experience and a chance to learn new skills and work collaboratively on projects. Though many did bring their own knitting to work on, the majority of ‘group labour’ was invested in making twiddlemuffs together. Kate enjoyed this sense of simultaneous disengagement and engagement when participating in the knitting group – she did knit at home and outside of the group but always to advance group projects. There was a sense that within Carers U Knitted, because each member undertook caring practices and responsibilities, they had complex relationships to spaces and places of leisure, such as a knitting group. There was a strong feeling from many members of the group that the group could not only be a space that was of benefit to them, in which they felt cared for. Their labours also had to be productive for others; to make charitable and caring things and relationships.

“Yeah, it’s good, because you’ve got other people who don’t think you’re crackers and then you get into, well, you’re passing on skills, it’s like a little community which is nice. You’re passing on relaxation, and charity and you’re making an impact - that’s important for me.”

(Diane, Carers U Knitted Interview, December 2013)

As Munro (2013) argues, women's taken for granted 'innate' capacity to care obscures the fact that caring is a skill, and like other skills requires work and practice. 'Carework' was an everyday practice for members of Carers U Knitted. In this case, skills in craft and care become *co-creative* at Carers U Knitted, such that leisure space must be productive to be leisurely, because boundaries of work, leisure and home are already so complex. The twiddlemuffs objectify and materialise the geographies of care that the group knits together.

Whilst made collectively to a pattern, Carers U Knitted's twiddlemuffs and decorations did not require a sustained organisation of individual knitters within a group project. This was, however, the case for 'Stoke Knittington' and their knitted model of Stoke Newington Common. Here, the group worked together to assemble one overall work; and collective making of the work was fundamental to the project.

"If it had just been the three of us, I think we would have got it done in half the time actually. Because I think when you just know what you're doing it gets done. But then it wouldn't have been, as much fun and everything would have looked too much the same. It would have just been three people. But it took on its own life because it had twenty people's personalities in it instead of three."

(Siobhan, Interview, February 2014)

The model took months to complete, and various levels of skill, labour and knowledge. As a collective creative knitted endeavour, the project needed to combine an overall vision and direction with room for creativity, innovation (Ingold and Hallam, 2009) and indeed diversity. In an interview with some of the group's members, they reflected on the complexity of the group dynamic they were seeking and achieved:

Joan: I don't know really, I think some people just wanted to come and do their own knitting, their own thing.

Siobhan: But the ones who weren't interested were the ones who don't live so locally so I think they felt it wasn't their project.

Liz: And also, it's quite an intimidating thing – if you're a knitter, or quite a conservative knitter to be told 'right we're going to knit the common, and we don't really quite know how that's going to work'... and actually when I put it like that I can understand that

Joan: I think people were scared off because they didn't have a vision of it. They couldn't imagine it.

Liz: Yes, but even if they could, they might have had the vision but they didn't know how they could start doing it. You know, I think you have to be, you have to have a mixture of sort of knowing how to knit and being quite creative and a bit foolhardy.

Siobhan: Yes, experimental.

(Interview, March 2014)

The group needed organisation and coordination. Siobhan played an important role in that regard. More generally though, a division of labour and the need for some instructions (Knott, 2013) was accompanied by an experimental development of the piece as the knitters explored what was possible and how to render specific parts of the landscape.

Siobhan: Someone comes and says I want to do something and you have to work out what they're capable of, and what needed doing and also sometimes explaining 'how' to do it. I mean I can say to Joan – just knit me a tree, Liz just knit me a flower bed – and they'd go away and do-it. But other people would be like 'OK, where's the pattern?' So having to guide people. And the other thing I did was just experiment. So, what I really enjoyed was just the figuring out of things. How are we going to do a 'railway bridge'? How are we going to do 'a swing'? I knitted a few trees, having worked out how to do trees; I sort of stopped doing trees then because everyone else was doing trees. I just moved on to – it seems to me I did lots of very small things. I didn't do anything big and gorgeous.

Liz: In some ways it was great that you stopped doing trees – because we all had our own version of doing trees and we didn't want them all to be the same. We wanted variety; we wanted different sorts of trees. We wanted diversity really!

Mary: I guess that's the pleasure of doing organic things like trees – accommodating different skills and things – there are no right answers, it's an organic thing.

Siobhan: Yes exactly. We kept saying that – you couldn't make a mistake! A: there's no pattern that you've made a mistake from. B: It's a tree – its got knobbly bits and they bend and they twist! Some go straight up, some go out wide so.... I think once the penny dropped people started to relax and really enjoy it. So people started to relax and they might have been like 'God, I really don't know what I'm doing here!' to 'Oooh yeah! Now I'm going to start knitting lots'. So even Raj, our most novice knitter, when she was knitting her tree she thought 'ooh I've just made a knot in my tree and I'm really proud of it' and it was deliberate and she was really proud.

(Interview, March 2014)

As well as accommodating varied skill levels, the specific material potentialities of knitting practices mattered too.

Siobahn: The thing with crochet is it's much, much easier to free-form in crochet than it is with knitting – so you can just take off in whatever direction you want, you can go off on a long big... and come back, you can make it fatter you can make it thinner – whereas with knitting it needs so much more planning on shape and to be honest anything that wasn't absolute rectangle or something, I would crochet because it gave you more freedom. But there were some things that I started off crocheting but then switched and thought no it will be neater if I knit this.

Liz: Those big blocks, like grass they needed to be knitted because they'd give it nice texture.

Siobahn: We had some people like Jean, Jean only crochets so she started off by making foliage for our trees and she said 'is it okay if I try a trunk?' and I said 'Well yes, go for it' – none of us had thought to crochet trunks so that was great.

(Interview, March 2014)

Stoke Knittington's knitted Stoke Newington Common presented a common space for the community, but also sought to embody in the knitting itself, both as form and process, the diversity of the community they were representing in miniature.

“Knitting is good for you”: well-being and the therapeutic geographies of making.

“Knitting has incredible health benefits. It makes people feel good in just about every way”, according to Katherine Martinko (2014) writing for popular sustainability website ‘Treehugger’. Similarly, Perri Lewis (2013) has explored the therapeutic similarities between yoga and knitting for British newspaper The Guardian. During the course of my fieldwork, the academic research into health, wellbeing and knitting gathered pace. In sum, it has been argued that knitting enhances well-being. In part this is through the production of social connections, friendships and carescapes, as I have discussed above. The portability of knitting has been linked to a capacity for enabling social situations and group participation, and these social situations that develop around knitting have been cast as enhancing wellbeing by providing a sense of belonging and active participation in the world (Gauntlett, 2011). However, knitting also benefits us through the connections it makes to our selves. Knitting is both social and contemplative and personal. Through its rhythmic qualities and repetitive movements, knitting can be calming and comforting - the body *physically* benefits from knitting, it is suggested (Riley, 2013; Corkhill *et al*, 2014).

The importance of knitting as a tool of relaxation and stress alleviation was often discussed during the various knitting groups I attended. During one session of Hammerknit, Anita was talking about booking a long weekend away with her partner to ‘get away from it all’ after difficult weeks at work. Anita jokingly had suggested taking the train to Aberdeen from London because the opportunity to knit on a long journey would be the most relaxing part of the holiday for her - other members echoed this sentiment as a ‘great idea’. Despite not being the most proficient knitter, on the whole I felt relaxed and enjoyed attending Hammerknit. Sometimes I was tempted to put off my attendance and take advantage of the flexibility of membership – telling myself that I had too much writing this week (or indeed that I just wanted to get home and watch Coronation Street). Especially on

days when I felt anxious or worried, the knitting group could seem like just another task to accomplish, another duty to perform. But having gone, I would always lament such inclinations and leave the café feeling better about myself. I had been productive and I had enjoyed the chance to chat, or indeed not, whilst still feeling sociable that I had participated in something.

Geographers have long engaged with the notion of ‘therapeutic landscapes’ and places that are conducive to well-being, care and healing. These places have more often been ‘escapes to nature’: (communal) gardens, woodlands, retreats, holidays (Milligan *et al*, 2004; Lea, 2009; Gelser, 1993). Conradson (2005) highlighted the importance of attending to relational geographies of humans, non-humans, materials and place in the creation of these ‘therapeutic landscapes’, focusing on the practices that shape or produce therapeutic ‘encounters’. This chimes with the calls from more contemporary health geography to think about therapeutic landscapes as ‘flow’, as an engagement with mobilities and the possibilities of bodily motions and ‘doings’ (Gattrell, 2011; Gattrell, 2013; Pitt, 2014). For example, Hannah Pitt (2014) explored the ‘doings’ and the experience of ‘flow’ whilst gardening (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002); she suggests that geographers should engage with the skill, process and tasks that help bring therapeutic spaces into being through their ‘therapeutic’ experience.

In discussing their experiences of working on knitting projects, a number of my research participants reflected on this issue. In so doing, they differentiated between different kinds of knitting processes and the different interior states these generated. Here for example is Diane:

“To sit and knit, I mean sometimes just doing something plain like the back of a jumper, or a twiddlemuff, is relaxing, but sometimes more complicated stuff you’re concentrating on what you’re doing. You can’t be worrying about stuff all the time, so your mind is elsewhere, you’re not stressed... you’re tired because you’re concentrating but you’re not stressed – the issue that you were worried about isn’t there, so it’s a different sort of tired, it’s a good tired, and you’ve got something to show for it.”

(Diane, Interview, October 2013)

So, some knitting ‘flows’ through ease and habit and the unthinking rhythmic movements of hands, needles and fibre; and other knitting is more demanding, not so relaxing, perhaps even tiring, but also flows in ‘a good way’ through concentration and immersion in a task. The idea of ‘getting lost’ in one’s knitting, and of having difference experiences of time than that of the linear clock or the daily routine, was commonly voiced. Barbara expressed some pleasure in this:

“It gets to that stage, where I’m knitting before my husband’s got in, and I think I’ve got to get his tea on, but I don’t want to put my knitting down. Many times he’ll come in and say ‘another twiddle muff?’ – but I love it, but I only knit at home and in the centre, nowhere else. I just enjoy relaxing and doing the knit. I feel comfortable; I didn’t realise it was so comforting really, just the wool on the needles and how it’s growing like. I must admit I get carried away; the time just goes so quick, you’re not thinking of anything else, you’re just relaxing”

(Barbara, Interview, November, 2013)

Barbara gets ‘carried away’ by her knitting: ‘carried away’ to a different sense of time and space, where teas can wait and time flies by; ‘carried away’ into an interior state of relaxed, comforting focus; ‘carried away’ with her own pleasure. The domestic space of social relations and obligations and work becomes a space-time of self-preoccupation and nurture. Chelsea echoes this sentiment in talking about the good that knitting does her mother:

“Well yeah, I think it’s for my Mum really. It’s time for herself. She does all the dealing with my Dad, all his medication and everything. She gets stressed out. But something like this knitting group, because it’s like ten till two on Wednesday, it’s probably like ‘chill time’ here. It’s just to get away really isn’t it? – Then you go back home and you do what you’re doing and you’re ready to get back to it.” (Chelsea, Interview, November, 2013)

At times then, knitting groups and their social connections are stimuli for re-connecting with oneself.

The space and place of knitting together

“I arrive early and Sue’s setting up. She’s got a couple of big shopping bags and out of one she pulls several biscuit tins. We’re in a smaller room than normal and Sue’s feeling flustered in case there’s new starters to the group and we’re all cramped in. We move chairs around to make the most of the space, and Sue pops the biscuit tins onto the coffee table. One holds needles and thread, the other contains buttons and small adornments. Sue empties the other shopping bag onto the floor – it’s full of yarns! The small room is looking pretty busy. Within half an hour it feels alive with colourful mess and everyone’s digging in, rummaging around for materials.”

(Carers U Knitted Fieldnotes, October 2013)

I want now to turn more directly to the spaces and places that help to constitute knitting’s making of connections, in particular for the knitting groups that I have been discussing so far. Academic, societal and media attention paid to the popularity of knitting often focuses on the mobility of knitting and its movement from private and domestic spheres to public space (Braisch and Brush, 2011; Wallace, 2013). In the context of this movement, knitting has been framed as having evolved from a solitary pursuit that takes place in the home to a convivial, participatory and more collaborative knitting culture that takes place in public and communal spaces. However, this oversimplifies matters. Knitting groups suggest something of the complexity and variability in public knitting cultures.

Geographer Alison Hui (2013) has highlighted the potential of craft both to move its sites of making and to create mobilities away from domestic space and the home. Hui (2013) engages with quilters and their movements between different festivals and events similar to those discussed in Chapter Four. Even more so than quilting, the material of knitting and the space it occupies allow it to move in and out of places easily – needles, yarns, threads; patterns, decorations and adornments like buttons etc.; all are portable and mobile. This is a particular and important characteristic of knitting as a craft, creative process and type of making. Not all crafts are as mobile: for example, Dydia Delyser (2014) has explored the difficulties of mending and repairing ‘immobile objects’ by illustrating the geographies, skills

and materials needed to fix an early 1920's neon sign in LA. Other 'vernacular creativities' also require certain spaces and enact certain geographies. For example, in their research on custom car design Gibson and Warren (2011) highlight the networks, spaces and communities that sustained enthusiasm for the design and repair of cars – outlining how spaces such as garages thus become important sites of community.

In this section I explore the various spaces through which the knitting groups I studied took place. The squeezing/blurring of spaces to make space for activities, and the 'making do', 'ad-hoc', 'pop-up' spaces of knitting groups can reflect creative improvisation and possibilities (Morton, 2005). Equally, the fact that knitting groups often temporarily borrow places can also reflect broader concerns as to why knitting practices may be forced into negotiating precariousness and 'out-of-placeness' (Creswell, 1996; Sibley, 2002). The spaces that these knitting groups used were varied: in terms of their material setting, atmosphere and public/private status. In the discussion below, I explore these spaces and their affect on the group, how the group negotiated these spaces, and how knitting both made and unmade certain spaces. I do this in three ways. Firstly, I begin by reflecting on the temporalities of knitting groups and how they negotiate the spaces they occupy. Secondly, I reflect on the importance of knitting groups to the making of place for physical community centres and institutions. Thirdly, I reflect on ways in which knitting groups disrupt space by negotiating public and private boundaries, and consider how the mobility that empowers some knitting groups and their making can also ambivalently disempower.

Stoke Knittington met weekly in Siobhan's home next to Stoke Newington Common. The house was big, sprawling and a comfortable home. The knitting group worked well here. Siobhan provided tea and homemade cake, which, as discussed by the group, signified her role as 'a good host'. Siobhan worked in the City and her husband was a lecturer – they had two children attending local colleges and applying for university. The knitting group took place in the 'front room' of the house, which was dedicated to leisure – it was filled with musical instruments, artwork and books piled high on shelves. The curation of this home space and the objects within conveyed the stable middle class identities of Siobhan's family

(Reimer and Leslie, 2004; Pink, 2004). However, Siobhan admitted, “The knitting group started on the Common. We got together to knit outside on the Common, and we weren’t supposed to end up in people’s houses” (Interview, February, 2014). The knitting group took place at Siobhan’s home because of the scale of the project they were undertaking and the need to store materials, as well as because the project took longer than anticipated and it was no longer practical to knit on the Common in winter. Siobhan had the space to accommodate the knitting group. This was an ambivalent process, including for Siobhan. As Sophie Bowlby (2011; 616) notes, “bringing a friend into the home can be a step towards greater intimacy; however, it can be a risky strategy if social difference of wealth and cultural capital that were of marginal importance are now made more apparent. Perhaps bringing a friend home signals trust that the friendship can withstand evidence of such social differences”. For Liz, a member of Stoke Knittington, this movement of the knitting group into houses was problematic:

“People don’t want to step out of their comfort zone. I mean it’s not only knitting, and doing something a bit different, but it’s also with a group of people you don’t know – so it’s a double thing. You have to feel confident about knocking on the front door of someone you’ve never met before – it is a bit more complex than just knitting.”

(Liz, Interview, February, 2014)

More generally, the group recognised that the move into private homes potentially affected recruitment and continued membership – especially for the production of a ‘community’ project. The community that the group performed became more narrowly located and enclosed through the domestic spaces used in the knitting.

For Carers U Knitted it was important that the knitting group took place outside of domestic space – which for carers in the group was constituted by management of formal care-giving practice (Milligan, 2003). Whilst knitters in the group often took projects ‘home’ and worked on them individually (as did members of Stoke Knittington), on the whole members attended the knitting group to get ‘out of the house’ and to take a break from negotiating multiple responsibilities. More than this, the group were united by their support of the Carers’ Centre as a place of friendship

and informal caring relationships. Mobility out of the home may also reflect some elements of necessity due to lack of space or time for leisure within the home.

Marybeth Stalp (2007) discussed the difficulties quilters experience in finding a 'space' for their fabric 'stash'; and others have commented on a wider craft consumer impulse to collect or hoard material and the consequent struggle to find space for that collection within the home (Campbell, 2005; Gregson, 2007). Sue, who organised Carers U Knitted, often discussed how much she longed for space to keep her craft materials together at home, or even within the Carers' Centre. Her materials and tools were stored in various "bags for life" and re-used chocolate and biscuits tins, which she brought to knitting group weekly. Equally, Stoke Knittington felt a lack of 'place' for their knitting group to take place and, in a sense moved into members' homes as a last resort. In short, whilst mobility of knitting may empower and increase visibility for craft (Wallace, 2013), at the same time this mobility also reflects knitting's marginality as a form of vernacular creativity and creative labour (Turney, 2009).

As discussed above, the knitting group I attended called 'Hammerknit' met weekly in a local café on a busy high-street in West London. Whilst there was no formal agreement with the café about the knitting group taking place there, the café was welcoming of the group. Notably, on special occasions such as birthdays and Christmas the baristas turned a 'blind eye' to the homemade and shop bought food that was brought into the café and shared by the group. In short, the knitting group – in its various formations and attendees - were 'regulars' in the café (Laurier, 2013); by around my tenth visit to the knitting group, the barista asked "the usual tea is it?" The stitch and bitch movement is notable for taking place in public spaces – pubs, coffee shops and parks (Minehan and Cox, 2007; Tourney, 2009; Wallace, 2013). Yet little work has been conducted that investigates the role of these places to the interactions of the knitting group. Whilst the café was 'accommodating' to the group, tables could not be reserved but depended on members arriving a little earlier than the 6pm start to 'get a good spot'. This was difficult; given that attendance at the group was fluid.

“There’s quite a big group knitting tonight, and we’re taking up a sizeable amount of space in the café. Because of this, there’s been a lot of encounters and interactions with other patrons as they’ve negotiated around our table, squeezing themselves in to fit past our group and often making comments on our knitting, sharing quick stories, or just smiling/sharing humorous glances at the situation. About half way through the group, a man squeezes past the table and says, “When do you think my pullover will be ready girls? I’m expecting it soon”. His female companion tuts and nudges him as if to say “shut up”. Members of the knitting group roll their eyes, and Harriet leans in and whispers, “I loathe men like that”. Carrie comments, “I have my knitter’s face, that means ‘fuck off and die’ when men ask me questions like that.”

(Hammerknit Group, September 2013)

Knitting groups crafting in public space take up a sizeable amount of room - arms knitting with two needles, people spinning, yarns and needles being passed to and fro. Bodies that are knitting materially occupy space in multiple ways, by being active, or becoming, in situ; not only this, but projects and matter are becoming too in the making process (Ravetz *et al*, 2013). Feminist geographers have long acknowledged the ways that women’s bodies and materials become ‘out of place’ – pregnant bodies, fat bodies, lactating bodies (Longhurst 2001; Longhurst, 2005; Colls, 2011; Boyer, 2011). Knitters, with their yarns, needles, and making visible the ‘labour of making’, can also be deemed out of place. To knit in public is to make a statement about women’s subjectivities in space and bodies that are fluid and becoming. Ultimately knitting in public reveals much about public/private boundaries and spaces, and the matter and bodies that we expect in each. Bodies that knit can be deemed to be out of place, in certain spaces.

“Anna again comments how she likes knitting because she can knit on the tube and not take up too much room. Ella says the same – she’s started knitting with circular needles even for flat knitting because it takes up less room. She says with big knitting needles she worries she’ll be like “one of the men who feel the need to straddle, and take up excessive room”. Continuing she says: “It disgusts me. You know a man once told me he sat

like that ‘to cool down his bits after walking so fast’ – frankly, I didn’t need to know that and it’s vulgar”. Everybody agrees, with rolled eyes and mutterings of ‘here here’. Carrie says how important it is that we stand our ground and make men like that “know it’s not okay to take up the space, but take up the space with our knitting.”

(Hammerknit Fieldnotes, March, 2013)

For some women, then, knitting in public is a way to claim space, to counter and subversively mimic the occupations of public space made by men. The collective voicing of affirmation recorded in the fieldnotes excerpted above is suggestive of a collective empowerment through the knitting group’s public presence. However, not all women felt this way; indeed, for some, this general mood would only made them feel more out of place, ‘affect aliens’ to use Sara Ahmed’s (2010) term. Not all knitters feel comfortable knitting ‘in public’, and often this discomfort is felt through different identities. Whilst some women may feel empowered and confident to knit publically, for others crafting in public space is a source of anxiety - it enacts a feeling of being ‘out of place’ (Taylor, 2012).

Laura: What’s it like then? Being part of the group?

Chelsea: Well I don’t know. Because sometimes it’s like, you associate knitting with older people. And I’m not sure I’m a knitter. But I feel proud of something I’ve finished and I wanna go on Facebook and share it but it’s like “Oh, shall I do this, or not?”

Laura: Would you not post it to Facebook then, you know, go public with your knitting?

Chelsea: Well, yeah I have done the odd time and people have been dead nice, like “wow have you made that?” But it’s like, I’m only twenty, so it’s a bit embarrassing for me really, my boyfriend laughs at me. I went to his house the other day and I was like “I’m just gonna do a bit of this Twiddle Muff”, and he said to me “What next, are you gonna have a broken hip or something?” It is a good thing that I can take my knitting out and about. But I couldn’t knit it in public, no. I dunno, it’s just one of those things, I’m young and I can’t be seen knitting – obviously I take it to my boyfriend’s

but no I couldn't. It's not cool enough. If anyone saw me I'd be like that [covers face] – no I couldn't do that”

(Chelsea, Carers U Knitted, Interview, November, 2013)

Laura: Do you knit outside the home, or...?

Shelia: Well, no I don't, and I don't know whether I would feel uncomfortable, but it's doing something else doing that. Knitting is a pleasure, it's not an obsession, and so I don't want to go overboard with it. I enjoy doing it at home in my own space.

(Shelia, Carers U Knitted, Interview, December, 2013)

In both the interview and informal conversations with Chelsea she expressed how important being part of the knitting group was to her. It enabled her to feel productive, useful and needed. It provided a sense of belonging that she felt she lacked as she sought full time employment. For Chelsea, the knitting group was an empowering space; compared to the potential vulnerability she might feel knitting outside of the group. However, Chelsea would not like to be seen knitting 'in public'. This sentiment was shared by other knitters, like Shelia, who knit only at home and in the company of her family or friends for fear of being defined as 'obsessive'. Knitting in public, then, opens one up to the public judgement of one's knitting identity. Whilst for some, this empowers, with knitting performing a feminist re-coding of public space, for others the empowerment of knitting comes from creating a feminine space outside of everyday public gazes.

Members of Hammerknit were not only confident and felt empowered by knitting publically, but it could be argued that their knitting had more explicitly political geographies – based around challenging perceptions of craft, women who knit, and expectations of where knitting should take place. As mentioned above in my Hammerknit Fieldnotes (March, 2013), it is important for some knitters to 'take up space with knitting'. I would suggest that the empowerment, or disempowerment, that knitters feel through knitting publically is related to broader identities. Whilst the space of the knitting group functions as a space that allows wider identities to be submerged as people come together to knit and be judged as knitters, the notion of 'knitting publically' brings these wider identities back into play. For some, public

knitting compromises the comforting and vital space made through the knitting group, as anxieties around identities come to the fore. For some, knitting stays at home, or in quasi public-private spaces such as the community centre, so that the group can be empowering, away from the anxious affective register of public spaces.. In other words, whilst some, and I would argue those knitters with more middle class identities, feel empowered to knit in public, and to express outrage and disbelief at people's sometimes negative reaction to "public knitters", for others it is more empowering if knitting stays at home or in private. Whilst for some the act of knitting publicly is empowering and challenges boundaries, for others it is a less comfortable experience. It is too simplistic to see this as a matter of personal confidence; rather, this reflects how the identifications and affectual forces of being a knitter intersect with other aspects of identity, and thus how they are embodied and felt.

Thus, the spatial relationships and ideas of mobility/immobility worked through knitting groups are complicated. They are shaped by intersectional politics of identity. Public knitting is not only gendered, in my research, but it is classed too. Not everyone who knits moves or wants to move their knitting into public spaces; there are complex spaces of domesticity and notions of femininity to which people feel subscribed (Appleford, 2015).

"Sometimes I think I'm the only knitter in the world – but I'm happy with that": Knitting stays at home?

'It is striking to note that among all the positive cheer surrounding knitting groups; the lone knitter is often absent.' (Hemmings, 2014; 50)

In this final section of the chapter I want to develop this attention to knitting done in 'in private', drawing on my research in Warrington with ten lone knitters. As described in Chapter Three, these knitters were recruited through networks of family and friends in my 'home town' as I looked to move beyond the focus on social and public forms of knitting as defining the contemporary knitting scene. Demographically, the participants in this strand of the research would have mostly self-identified as working class, white and were older than most of the participants in the knitting groups I studied. In examining their accounts I have two interlinked

objectives: to show the connective qualities of knitting are not limited to more recent forms of social knitting but also present in lone, domestic knitting; and to explore the intergenerational geographies of knitting by unpicking the relations between a contemporary knitting scene characterised by knitting groups, yarnbombing and knitting artists and so-called ‘grandma knitting’. Before turning to analyse some of the empirical materials, let me map out that wider terrain a little more fully.

Elizabeth Nathanson (2013; 109) has suggested that “supposedly ‘hip’ craft artists distinguish themselves by first acknowledging the associations of crafts with a conservative aesthetic and ‘elderly’ point of view, and then by reinventing these crafts with a knowing and often ironic eye.” This notion is, in part, produced by the representation of crafts on television and popular culture (Hollows, 2003; Hollows, 2009). These representations “generate an image of femininity that acknowledges prior generations of women and “women’s works” but distinguishes itself from those generations through craftwork that is always invested in “updating” that past for a more liberated generation of women” (Nathanson, 2013; 109).

In my own empirical work, I found slightly more ambivalent and complex relations to the histories and traditions of knitting. For example, as discussed above, members of Hammerknit saw it as important that they knitted in the quasi-public space of a café, associating this with a feminist spatial politics. However, they would also regularly voice their annoyance with media ‘hype’ around the contemporaneity of knitting and the consistent discourses of ‘re-discovery’ of a craft ‘no-longer for grandmas’. What frustrated them about this repeated discourse of ‘knitting as fashionable and popular now’ was that it undermined their commitment to developing a skilled practice over time and negated their dedication and enthusiasm to craft. It reduced their own practice to a consumer fashion. As Dirix (2014; 92) puts it: “despite the cries of the press that ‘Knitting is back!’ it in fact never went away”; indeed, to ignore this “is to negate the true craftsmanship of those who have trained for years to achieve this status” (Dirix, 2014; 93). In short then, there is a tension between those embracing the imaginations of knitting as ‘grandmotherly’ as a way to position their own practice as a knowing and more politically progressive

reinvention of tradition and those who see this framing as ‘degrading’ to contemporary craftsmanship.

Further, discourses of knitting as ‘grandmotherly’ evoke notions of the craft as a solitary experience and domestic labour that contemporary knitting has re-negotiated through social knitting and ‘making things together’ (Gauntlett, 2011). Whilst I have illustrated throughout this chapter that knitting groups are spaces of connection and friendship, I have been troubled by the valorisation of social making. For example, David Paton (2013), in his autoethnographic reflections on working with stone to sculpture, highlights the highly subjective, embodied relationship or dialogue between makers and materials a relationship that can be considered social in an expanded sense (as more-than-human, place-making etc.). Such studies suggest that there is the potential for deep engagement with ‘others’ when working alone. In the context of knitting, I have already illustrated in this chapter the importance of the therapeutic potential of making knitted items for my research participants. But knitting has different social and cultural connotations than the working with stone that Paton explores – bound up in the gendering of its craft, as domestic work, and indeed its ‘grandmotherly’ associations.

As Jessica Hemmings (2014; 49) reminds us, “depictions of knitting as a solitary pastime are often presented in negative terms: loneliness, isolation, even madness”. Jonathan Faiers (2014) has highlighted the use of knitting and ‘the knitter’ in cinema to signal impending doom. Hilary Geoghagen (2012; 44) discusses more generally how enthusiasm is not always about un-alloyed joy especially when it is taken ‘too far’. These negative views are reflected in pejorative terms such as ‘geeks, anoraks, and nerds’. Knitters, and especially elderly knitters, have suffered from such negative stereotyping. But it is ‘grandmothers’ who knit that have suffered the most – kept in their place, at home, rendered immobile and (s)motherly to authenticate the pursuit of ‘traditional’ craft by contemporary knitters who both struggle to overcome the persistence of stereotypes in order to have their skill taken seriously, whilst at the same time re-enforcing the ‘difference’ between grandmothers who knitted for their ‘domestic duty’ and knitters who knit ‘because they can and want to’ (see Bell and Hollows (2008) for a parallel engagement with women, domesticity, tradition, authenticity and culinary culture).

In sum then, contemporary discourses around knitting's valorization through its public, social and participatory aspects of crafting neglect or render less visible the productive, solitary and home-based knitter. In this final section of the chapter I want to counter this neglect by illustrating the ways in which older knitters are empowered by their solitary craft pursuits within the home. Their enthusiasm for crafting is not about obsession, or over-accumulation (which, as illustrated in Chapter Four, could be more easily said of contemporary knitters and their pursuit of materials and connections at festivals) but has a temporality and spatiality that, whilst largely pursued alone, is based around the family, friendships and personal enjoyment. Whilst feminist geographers have rightly invested energy into un-doing the home as haven thesis (see Brickell, 2013 for expansion), for some the home and domestic or caring activities are practices that empower and / or are a source of creativity. Past research has shown, for example, that domestic provisioning practices to do with food and cooking are especially important in the shaping of identities, the forming of families, and the design and appearance of physical domestic space, for example, the design of kitchens (Cox, 2013). Indeed, Meah and Jackson (2012) explored the notion of 'crowded kitchens' and some women's anxieties over feeling being less skilled or useful when domestic responsibilities become shared with partners. This section, I hope, goes some way into unraveling the negative associations of the 'lone-knitter' by highlighting, through portraits of individual women, the creative and quiet ways they re-inscribe domestic space with their enthusiasm for craft.

Knitting nanas?

Grandparents have been under-researched by Human Geographers and, societally, 'grandparent' identities suffer from weak associations with stereotypes of old age (Tarrant, 2010). Further, these identities are spatialized – meaning that old age becomes in or out of place, making those who embody these stereotypes 'feel like a grandma or grandad' (Mowl *et al* 2005). Knitting is a practice that is widely associated with 'grandmothering' and old age – to knit, for some, is to act beyond their years 'like a grandma'. The slowness of stitching seems to reflect the supposed slowness and immobility of the ageing body and the passing of time for those who have too much of it. Knitting reinforces too the notions of care and comfort with which grandmothers are associated (Minahan and Wolfram Cox, 2012). I

interviewed eight 'lone' grandmothers; as well as several other 'grandmothers' during my research with knitting groups – the average age of these grandmothers varied from around 55 to 80 years old. It was in fact my eldest participant, Teresa, who at 80 years old said that she wouldn't like to knit in public 'for fear of being judged as a fuddy duddy Grandma'.

As I have mentioned previously in this chapter, knitting as a tool for health and well-being can physically and mentally aid the 'ageing body'. However, in this section I want to complement that focus by exploring the creativity of 'grandmothers' for whom knitting practices and habits are both a reaction to the spatialities and embodiment of ageing and their role in the home as 'grandma'. I hope to illustrate how, through knitting, these grandmothers creatively re-shape their domestic spaces: enjoying the introversion of crafting alone, but also developing connections, especially familial connections. Let me begin by introducing Joan.

"Joan's in her seventies and she heard about the project through my Grandma. She's anxious about meeting up for a chat, because she's worried her knitting is too boring or plain to discuss. I tell her not to worry, we'll just have a cup of tea – it's not an interrogation. I arrive at Joan's and she's laid all her latest projects on the sofa to chat about. She'd usually keep them in a box behind the sofa and her yarn 'stash' in the cupboard under the stairs. She makes a pot of tea and we take it into the conservatory. Joan has recently 're-decorated' and she wanted to show me her sofas and chairs. Joan has crocheted some cushion covers and throws with some left over yarn from other projects. She says it's just a nice easy way to update the house and it's kept her busy."

(Meeting with Joan, Fieldnotes, August, 2013).



Figure 5.5: Joan's crochet cushions, Author's own.

Joan has knitted for most of her adult life. Her knitting and crochet fit into a wider love of crafting and particularly dressmaking. For Joan, knitting and crochet is something she ‘just does and always has done’. Home life both shapes Joan’s craft and is *shaped by* Joan’s craft – in a material sense. Sarah Pink (2015; 219) has long highlighted how home and family relationships can be acknowledged, made and remade through activities such as laundry. Such practical activities, she argues, “create a line or thread through the home that interweaves with, and makes a series of social, technical, material, intangible constituents of home”. Through ‘crochet’ Joan can physically *re-make* her own home. It is a reality that Joan spends more time at home than she used too now she is older – but rather than knitting signifying ‘tradition’ and static tastes, Joan uses her skill to re-craft her home and to update its appearance. On the whole, Joan does so alone – during the interview she stated, “No, I’m just a lone knitter. Any problems, I just work them out by myself. I like knitting alone by myself”. Joan was technically minded, and enjoyed difficult projects.

As well as re-making her own home, Joan would regularly re-use and re-knit items she was unhappy with.

“Sometimes I re-use knitting. You know, you can’t use it straight away. You have to unpick it and then wash it and use it again. But I do. You see you used to get knitting skeins, and you’d put it over a chair. It goes a bit wavy, but once you wash it, and dry it wet you can use it to knit again. I re-knitted a cardigan the other day because it was a bit old-fashioned for me.”

(Interview with Joan August 2013).

For Joan, crochet and knitting, whilst leisurely and enjoyable, were also shaped by a commitment to saving money, time and being economic with material. In this sense, historical associations of knitting as provisioning and domestic labour did shape Joan’s practice, but in creative ways, rather than limiting them. I got the sense that Joan enjoyed the challenge of using up materials and re-knitting to improve. Joan’s materials and stashes might occupy hidden and limited spaces under the sofa and stairs, but her creative practices re-cast domestic space in material and social ways. Joan improved her conservatory so her family could enjoy it when they visit; indeed, Joan wanted the interview to take place in the conservatory because it was her ‘favourite room’ at the moment. Joan admitted she was “too shy to be part of a group” but she curates a creative, social and rewarding personal geography through knitting. Joan is not bound to home, but rather modifies and updates it through a craft that she enjoys working on, alone.

Margarie, is retired, in her seventies and primarily occupies her time by caring for her grandchildren. She has knitted and crocheted all her life, and is especially well known for producing knitted toys for her family and friends:

“I love making knitted dolls – they’re nice and soft for babies – and also you can wash them. I mean, I wouldn’t wash them all the time but you can wash them and that’s important.”

(Interview, April, 2014)

“I started knitting from a young age, because my Mum did. It’s not that I was a brilliant knitter, it’s just always been around and I’ve enjoyed it.”

(Interview, April, 2014).

Margarie enjoys the productive feeling of knitting, and how it makes her 'useful' to her family because 'no one else has learnt to knit, or mend'.

"I do lots of mending. Anything that needs fixing. You name it – I'll fix it. I've fixed holes in rucksacks and things – you know, it's like "You kids eat your tea, and I'll mend all this stuff."

(Interview with Margarie, April 2014)

Margarie is always on the go; she is purposeful and enjoys the routine of caring for her expanding family in her home, and those of her children and grandchildren. As Cox (2015; 4) puts it, 'homes are located within material contexts which affect how much DIY is done, how it is done, by whom, which skills are developed to do it successfully, how they are valued and how and to whom they are transmitted'. Margarie takes humble pride in being able to fix, mend and make things; a skill her daughters never learnt. DIY skills are gendered, so having (or not) the competence to do DIY can become part of a gendered sense of identity (Cox, 2015; 10).

"The last thing I knitted was for my grandson. He plays football for a little weekend team and they've got quite a following and his dad asked me to make some knitted hats for them in orange and black. A lot of it was guesswork; I had a pattern to give me a guide but just improvised. But yeah, they were admired and so I've had a few requests for bob hats. But I just enjoyed doing small projects; I don't want it to consume me – just little creative projects here and there, that will get finished and I'll do a good job of."

(Interview with Margarie, April 2014).

For Margarie, these skills are an important part of her being 'a good grandmother'. Margarie seemed reluctant to be defined as a knitter, though she knitted most days, and definitely most weeks. In a way, knitting for Margarie, and the other women I portray in this section, is bound to their roles as grandmothers, mothers and carers within the home. But, I argue this does not make their craft any less creative than knitters who may do so visibly, publically, and collectively. Rather, as McCabe (2013; 16) puts it.

“Women value the small and subtle improvisational changes they make as natural to self-expression, pleasing the family with sensory experiences, and recreating the bonds of family life through motherhood. Women also embrace change as they creatively adapt cooking practices to changing conditions throughout stages of life and motherhood. Creativity is thus a vital yet often unrecognized dimension of motherhood.” (McCabe, 2013; 16)

Knitting then, for Margarie, is a form of personal and social creativity shaped by her connections to family life. Again, as I introduced with my portrait of Joan earlier, we see how knitting is a source of creativity in the home, for older knitters who may be less connected to visible geographies of knitting through festivals and groups, but whose vernacular creativity is no less vibrant, but perhaps more quietly spoken.

Let me now tell you about Rose and Mavis. My paternal grandmother (Rose) is usually socially active. She plays bingo and dominoes at the local social club and has the highest success rate with raffles of any person I know. In September 2013, Rose had an injury that made her less mobile, more housebound and more reliant on care from others than usual. No longer able to attend her various leisure activities outside the home Rose decided to re-visit knitting as a hobby, a skill she had neglected for a number of years. She decided to knit ‘baby clothes’ for her youngest granddaughter’s dolls but did not have patterns or materials. My maternal grandmother (Mavis) has knitted on and off throughout her life. She grew up in a family that worked in shirt factories and in that context she has always made and mended clothes, and knitted too, but has not always enjoyed it – “it’s just something I’ve always done”. As Turney (2009; 11) argues, women who were involved with or lived through second-wave feminism find it difficult to reconcile pleasure with knitting and the domesticity that still taints it.

Rose got in touch with Mavis to see if she had patterns or materials to share – she did. Mavis has a good ‘stash’ of wool, needles and patterns and was happy to give them a new home, with a new purpose. Although I offered on various occasions to find more contemporary patterns, Rose felt more comfortable using older patterns and quickly made progress on the cardigans. It was at the ‘sewing up’ stage that she began to struggle and again contacted Mavis for assistance. Mavis offered to sew up the cardigans if Rose would knit them – and so, a very small but efficient production line of baby doll cardigans began. Rose would knit the cardigans, my Dad would deliver them to Mavis, who would sew them up and return the completed items via Dad or Mum. In short, despite being ‘house-bound’ for a time, Rose made and strengthened connections and friendships with Mavis over the sharing of craft projects. In the process, these quite ordinary knitting projects helped Rose and Mavis re-inscribe domestic practices as fun, leisurely and connective in a quiet, gentle way. The process combined ‘working alone’ with ‘being together’ through collaborative knitting projects.

For both Mavis and Rose, knitting is ‘just something they can do’, but the practice gained new significant and connective qualities when brought to the fore as leisurely when Rose, in particular, was bound to the home. This ‘re-discovery of knitting’ highlights, not just the contemporary potential of knitting to be enjoyed creatively, but that, even when knitting is ‘just something you did’ it can still be bound up in economies of affective labour, care and the practice of love (Black and Idle, 2014).

Teresa had also recently returned to knitting:

“So I started knitting again for my grandchildren and great grandchildren. I’m a plain knitter, but I prefer that because then I’m neat. But yeah it’s more personal to knit for babies isn’t it? Like my granddaughter when she found out she was having another baby said “Ah you will knit for me won’t you Nan, I love to see babies in their prams all wrapped up”. I said, “Okay, Linz I will”. (Interview with Teresa, August, 2013)

Teresa is the first to downplay her skills – in part, from lack of confidence in general, but also from the shared perspective of most ‘grandmas’ in this research that knitting is just something she’s always done: “some people are dead creative

and good at it, or some people are just like me and are all right at it and that's fine too" (Interview, August 2013).

As I have begun to intimate, such everyday practices of knitting are difficult to appreciate as distinctively leisurely, or to place as either work or consumption, because they are so bound up with care and relationships to the family (see Cox, 2013); but they are, I argue, no less creative. Teresa knows that to knit something is to be making something special and personable, but with a large family if she were to knit for one grandchild or great-grandchild she would feel responsible to knit for other members and her time would become pressured.

"But, then if I start knitting for our Linz, I'd have to make for our Julie too and maybe I just wanna' make something for myself so I can't be doing with it." (Interview with Teresa, August 2013).

This portrait of Teresa highlights the potential anxiety felt if the pressure to provide for the family, or to make things, becomes too much.

"There are sometimes when I think "ooh that's lovely that", and I'll carry on. And then there's sometimes where I'm feeling tired and I think just put it away and watch the telly; I've had enough of it."
(Interview with Teresa, August, 2013).

Turney (2014; 22) has explored the material and metaphorical relationships between knitting and parenthood. She argues, "knitting for one's children may be considered 'making love with needles'; it is repetitive and painful exercise that is fruitless, thankless and endless; one that must be unpicked and reworked to achieve success". Whilst I have argued that knitting is embedded in geographies of care and domestic work of the home and is creative for some knitters, this is not to negate that knitting, as a form of affective and emotional labour, can be 'repetitive' and 'painful'. Throughout this chapter, I have hoped to highlight diverse experiences of knitting. I am keen that geographers engaging with creative practices and amateur creativities acknowledge the sometimes-negative bodily experiences of making. Those that are weary, repetitive and arduous, and in pursuit of a 'job well done'

(Sennett, 2008) may have less than enchanting affective experiences. Sometimes, we need to bring the burden of reproductive labour back to the fore:

“I mend things yeah, if the hem isn’t quite right, or there’s a stitch not quite right. I couldn’t just leave it that would annoy me – I would say to myself that’s not right. I’m quite fussy like that. I’ve fixed the jumper (husband) John’s got on today – mended that many holes in it”. John is wearing a navy fisherman jumper, it’s covered in white paint because he wears it to ‘do jobs around the house’ – it’s full of obviously mended holes too. It looks comfortable.”

(Interview & Fieldnotes with Teresa, August 2013)

“To me, if I dropped a stitch, or the length wasn’t right, I couldn’t carry on so I just do straight forward cardigans and I’m happy with it. I don’t need to fuss. I’m happy with it. I can just repeat what I’m doing and I enjoy it. Otherwise it gets too much.”

(Interview with Teresa, August 2013)

Knitting -- as making, as connecting -- brings together potentialities for self-expression, self-development, creativity, enriched social relations, and for hard work, frustration, pressure, and expectations, encountering one’s limitations. ‘Knitting nanas’ deserve recognition, but neither romanticisation nor pity.

In Summary

Responding to influential arguments that ‘making is connecting’ (Gauntlett, 2011) in this chapter I have considered the connectivity of knitting. Drawing on my empirical research with three diverse knitting groups, the argument has been that such knitting established (diverse) spaces of friendship with a feminist ethic of care. I examined how these spaces were produced through the spaces and places of knitting groups, and by the ‘micro-geographies’ of socio-material practice and exchange. I also highlighted how the ‘neo-tribal’ identifications as knitters that brought these groups ‘together in difference’ do not simply replace but interact with intersectional dimensions of socio-cultural identity. In seeking to avoid a too literal

and simplistic association of connection with social co-presence, I also pointed to the testimony of my research participants on the role of knitting in experiencing a re-connection with the self. I also drew on another strand of empirical research with 'lone knitters' beyond knitting groups to emphasise the kinds of social connections fostered even when apparently knitting alone.

Chapter Six

Intervening: material, gender and place



Figure 6.1: 'HOME' yarnbombing, Shepherd's Bush. Author's own.

Material interventions: using yarn to change place

In “Craftbomb: the power of the pom-pom”, Donaldson (2013) argued “using yarnbombing or Guerrilla knitting, as it’s known, to make a political statement is becoming increasingly popular – largely because the medium takes on just as much importance as the message. Why throw glass bottles when you can take the moral high ground in every way, and vent your discontent through creativity rather than destruction?” Knitting, and textile craft more broadly, has historically been used to creative, crafty and subversive ends (Parker, 1989). Notably, the Suffragettes’ movement employed sewing skills to create protest banners; similarly, the AIDS memorial blanket deployed fabric to commemorate loss of life and to shift the terms of the political debate (Wheeler, 2012; Gambardella, 2011). However, at the time of the research in the UK there was an identifiable proliferation of creative practices under the banner of ‘craftivism’. Knitted activism seemed to increase in

visibility and material diversity. For Greer (2008; 127) these practices work “by taking two seemingly disparate words that are negatively stereotyped in their own ways (craft can be seen as dull or old-fashioned, activism as violent or radical) and combining them to create a new word, ‘craftivism’ [that] strikes out into new territory”. Notably, with knitting, this has seen the practice of ‘yarnbombing’ or ‘guerrilla knitting’ becoming popular and diversified. As shown in the figure above, yarnbombing is the act of placing something knitted in the urban landscape, usually around ordinary objects and urban infrastructures such as lampposts, benches or cycling racks.

For Hackey (2013; 171), “a willingness to reclaim the history of domestic crafts, engagement with notions of everyday activism, agency, and ingenuity, and a desire to act independently are all defining characteristics of the new super-connected amateur.” In this chapter I want to bring together debates on ‘new’ urban interventions or creative practices “under the banner of ‘insurgent’, ‘do-it-yourself’ (DIY), ‘guerrilla’, ‘everyday’, ‘participatory’, and/or ‘grassroots’ urbanisms”, (Iveson, 2013; 941; Mould, 2014) and put them into conversation with contemporary geographical debates on ‘quiet’, ‘everyday’ and ‘implicit’ activism (Askins, 2015; Horton and Kraftl, 2009; Jupp, 2007). In so doing, I wish to explore the precarity, ephemerality and transience of knitted interventions, in the context of their material, gendered and creative geographies.

Geographers have increasingly engaged with creative practices in the city that have been associated with particular subcultures. The most common line of argument, recently reinforced by the urban geographer Oli Mould, has been that “by subverting capitalistic functionalities of urban objects, [these creative practices] are adding different voices to the urban topography. That encourages us, however briefly and fleetingly, to think of a different city, one that encourages active participation and citizenship and resists passive consumption” (Mould, 2015, 128). Recently, ‘urban exploration’ has been cast as iconic here, framed within a politics of ‘place hacking’ (Garratt, 2013); but a wide array of practices has been alighted on. So perhaps, yarnbombing joins urban exploration, skateboarding, parkour, graffiti and so on (Borden, 2011; Saville, 2009; Young, 2014) as the latest creative practice that works with the *materials* of the city in creative, embodied, playful, or ludic ways (more generally see Stevens, 2007). In so doing, it may also offer an important

complement and corrective to the masculinist heroism that has been associated with many of these ‘urban subversions’ (Mould, 2015) (see Mott and Roberts, 2014 for the case of urban exploration).

More than this, yarnbombing also appears to join a collective of ‘DIY’ or ‘everyday urbanisms’. These activities, exemplified in studies of community or guerrilla gardening (Adams *et al*, 2013), are often “inspired by the cast-off, degraded objects and areas of the city. The material left to the side of the daily life of the city. It is from these areas of almost urban compost that new crops of work are growing, and a model for creative re-use of things, which many would assume had no further role to play in the city at all” (Burnham, 2010; 139). These acts inject urban sites with new functions and meanings, and embody a participatory engagement with the urban realm: “through the variety of actions and practices, insurgent public space enables the participation and actions of individuals and groups in renewing the city as an arena of civic exchanges and debates” (Hou, 2010; 16).

Alongside these debates, geographers engaging with activism and social change have highlighted the neglect of more ‘everyday’, ‘quiet’ or ‘implicit’ activism. Horton and Kraftl (2009; 16-17) suggest that traditional forms of activism or protest have a tendency to prioritise actions which are: dramatic, iconic, totemic, glamorous and heroic, leave a readily representable legacy, and are linked to broader social movements and/or ‘-isms’ or activist identities. This produces then, “a particular understanding of power, a particular version of resistance and, therefore, a particular politics” (Horton and Kraftl, 2009; 17). Notions like ‘everyday’, ‘quiet’ and ‘implicit’ activism are suggested as correctives to this dominant tendency, broadening the palette of what might be registered as activist engagement and political.

There is a further context here. Yarnbombing’s growing popularity somewhat predictably also throws into debate its activist and radical qualities. Yarnbombing is no longer associated with a specific sub-cultural group. A range of groups and knitters now yarnbomb. Particularly visible forms of yarnbombing are often commercial ventures, undertaken in collaboration with businesses, and deployed as part of wider forms of marketing and promotional culture. Rather than simply

accepting that such changes mark the ‘end of (true) yarnbombing’, I want to open up to scrutiny what the politics of such changes might be.

In this chapter, I engage with the *production* and *making* of yarnbombing with a focus on materials, materiality and craft labour. In doing so, I am concerned with precarity, transience, and ephemerality. Firstly, I start with the so-called ‘end of yarnbombing’ and the increasing use of knitted graffiti in branding, promotion and consumerism; which goes against the craft consumer ethics of its craft (Campbell, 2005). However, I do so to highlight the *precarity* of gendered craft labour (Hughes, 2011; Banks, 2010). Secondly, I engage with *transience*, by exploring the making, maintenance and repair of yarn bombs by the amateur knitters that produce them. Thirdly, I explore *ephemerality* in the context of documenting women’s histories and experiences of place through knitted interventions. Finally, in a coda to the chapter, I amplify the potential for yarnbombing and knitting to be a ‘quiet activism’ by returning to a different knitted intervention, Stoke Knittington’s miniature rendering of Stoke Newington Common.

Knitting the City: getting away (and paid) with it

I first discovered yarnbombing in November 2010, whilst watching ‘This Morning’ on British TV channel, ITV1. ‘This Morning’ is a magazine format lifestyle show that is one of the most popular programmes on British ‘daytime’ television. I watched as the knitting collective ‘Knit the City’ discussed with the presenter (Philip Schofield, sometimes accompanied in mid-market newspapers by the moniker ‘the housewives favourite’) how they employed their knitting and crochet skills to produce street art. The collective were discussing their most well-known yarnbomb - ‘The Phonebox Cosy’ (2009). I repeat this story because it says something about the cultural trajectory of yarnbombing that I want to discuss. Lifestyle television reveals much about the social and cultural practices of taste, status and identity – about the contemporary landscape of consumption (Bell and Hollows, 2006). The presence of yarnbombing on ‘This Morning’ highlighted the increasing visibility and popularity of knitting in general, and more particularly knitting that is playful, activist, or perhaps subversive in some way.



Figure 6.2: *Dial M for Monster, Deadly Knitshade*¹³. Author's own.

Knit the City was founded by knitter 'Deadly Knitshade' aka Lauren O'Farrell in 2009¹⁴. The group itself has varied in size and membership, but Deadly Knitshade continues to front the collective in 2015. Knit the City gained much popularity and visibility over the course of my PhD research. As such, I was unable to secure interviews, or research time with them, though I met Lauren at many events and spoke on panels with her – they were inundated with requests of academic, press and popular interest – but I was able to analyse their activities and how these were represented in a range of media. It is that analysis upon which I now draw.

The figure above displays an installation by Deadly Knitshade for British Telecommunications (BT); it is called 'Dial M for Monster'. It represents the increasing use of yarnbombing as a tool of advertising, branding and company promotion. For Mann (2015; 70) this shows that "yarn bombing has moved from embodying whimsy, through activist politics, to finally sit-frayed, faded and forgotten-back within the very systems it was trying to critique." Perhaps then, yarnbombing is, yet another creative practice that has been co-opted into the neo-liberal 'Creative City' policy discourse (Mould, 2015), and thus absorbed by

¹³ This was produced as part of the BT Art Box project. Eighty-four artists had been commissioned to create a customized K6 red telephone box to celebrate twenty-five years of the NSPCC Childline Charity.

¹⁴ Yarnbombers often adopt names, monikers, or alternative identities as part of the playful politics and practices of anonymity and authorship that have contemporaneously shaped this form of knitted intervention.

capitalism and re-shaped by the market relations it originally resisted (Daskalaki and Mould, 2013; 3). Below I want to illustrate this argument; and then look illustrate it more fuller, with nuance.

What on earth is 'Knit Bombing'?

If you were looking for an example of the incorporation of yarnbombing into 'business as usual' consumer cultures then it would be hard to find a more striking example than the 'Knit Bombing' campaign run by high-street retailer women's clothing retailer Warehouse, in 2013, to support the launch of their Autumn/Winter collection. This was a marketing campaign that encouraged those purchasing clothing from Warehouse, specifically knitwear, to undertake what they called 'knit-bombing'. Here is an example of the information they gave customers and potential 'knit bombers':

"All you need to do is to pop into your nearest Warehouse store and pick up a Knit-Bombing Kit, which comes free when you buy pieces of selected knitwear. Then snap a pic of your knit-bombing attempt and upload to Instagram or Twitter along with the hashtag #KnitBombing so we can marvel at your ingenuity.

The weirder and wackier the better - we want to see you flexing some creative muscle; remember **the city is your playground**. There are no rules when it comes to Knit Bombing, so make any object you want a woolly one."

(Warehouse Website, 2013. Last accessed 10 June 2015:

<https://www.warehouse.co.uk/blog/trending/1094-warehouse-out-on-the-lamb>)



Figure 6.3: Sheep Parade window display, Warehouse, Author's own.



Figure 6.4: In store Knit Bombing, Warehouse. Author's own



Figure 6.5: Knit Bombing the Street, Warehouse. Author's own.

The campaign included 'in-store knit bombing' where knitted items were attached to the stores' infrastructure of shelving and display racks and so on. It was also reflected in Warehouse's window displays, where sheep were displayed wearing 'knit bomb' items. As Crewe (2015; 11) has argued, shop windows are a space for 'making, assembling, displaying and performing fashion – a co-production place that reflects contemporary consumer culture'. The Knit Bombing campaign, then, reflects the contemporaneity of knitting and craft culture within fashion (see Crewe, 2013). More than this, it adopts and adapts the playful, ludic and whimsical politics of yarnbombing, in the way the stores themselves were decorated and in how customers were encouraged through free kits to go out and 'knit bomb' public space. In this transformation of yarnbombing to 'knit bombing', it is easy to see the former as having been 'co-opted' by the systems and consumerism it wished to critique (Mann, 2015). Helen, a knitter and member of 'Warp and Weft' (a group I discuss later in this chapter), certainly felt this during our interview conversation. For her, what was particularly telling was how the changing agency of the intervention – from activist or sub-cultural group to major retail business – was accompanied by a changing materiality – from craft based work to deployment of a kit:

“Did you see Warehouse, ‘knit-bombing’? Commercialisation or what? They approached us down Market Street (in Manchester) and put a scarf around me and they were like ‘you’ve been knit-bombed!’ - it’s trying to pitch themselves as cool and alternative. I guess it’s like everything; it becomes commercial doesn’t it. You know, but Warehouse took it too far – it was so far removed from yarnbombing. Like who has even made this? How had it been made? You know knitting is to do with ‘make do and mend’ – and it’s insulting to actual makers that they appropriated it.” (Interview with Helen, November, 2013)

For Helen then, not only did the Knit Bombing campaign show that yarnbombing had indeed become ‘commercialised’, in doing so it de-valued the labour of knitters and the very makers who had started yarnbombing and ‘knit’ movements in earnest. Moreover, Helen discussed how this fast-fashion retail space was ethically opposite to the slow consumption evoked by a commitment to hand-knitting.

Melissa Butcher (2011) has argued that yarnbombing is subversive precisely because it is bound up within gift economies. It is a gift to a city, seemingly unproductive labour of which nothing is expected in return. In the Knit Bombing campaign something of this remains: those using the kits could indeed perform that ethos; the kits themselves were ‘free’ (with purchased knitwear!). But of course, here that ethos of gifting is being used within a promotional campaign. Promotional culture is all about what you get in exchange; it renders everything as marketing. We could respond to the Knit Bombing campaign, then, with a lament: for how notions of play, creativity, authenticity and especially the unexpected or surprise associated with yarnbombing (of knitting ‘out of place’) may not be emancipatory when those politics are harnessed for profit (Daskalaki and Mould, 2013).

However, this, I think, over-simplifies matters. It tends to the nostalgic politics of casting only ‘pure’, ‘original’ and perhaps less popular cultural interventions as progressive. I share Helen’s view that knit-bombing kits are a very different matter to crafting knitted interventions oneself or as part of a group (yarnbombing). But, there is a danger in elaborating that shift into a wider discourse of commodification that it simply becomes a cipher for a wider socio-cultural distinction, between

counter-cultural activists and the mainstream, with the latter always fated to be ‘the sheep’ following and degrading the practices made fashionable by the former. Analytically, what is at stake here is not a shift from gift to market exchange but a reconfiguration of their relations (yarnbombers buy wools, after all, just in different markets governed by different ethics). Nor is there simply a regrettable loss of craft skill and making: there is indeed that, but one has to be careful not to then cast all forms of less-skilled yarnbombing as less progressive. In sum, I think we need to be wary of rather too easy proclamations of the end of yarnbombing tied into wider overarching theorisations of commodification and incorporation.

Post-yarnbombing?

Helpful here is Luke Dickens’ (2008) work on another arena of urban intervention, street art. In his doctoral research on street art in London, Dickens sought to set out how this practice was forged within what he called ‘post-graffiti’ worlds. Here he looked to advance and critique earlier accounts of the geographies of graffiti, notably by Tim Cresswell (1996), that had worked through a binary distinction: that graffiti was either ‘out of place’ creative matter, cast as visual pollution by the authorities and as transgressive of place norms by its practitioners; or it was reclaimed and incorporated as being ‘in place’, for example through the adoption of some of its aesthetics by artists who then became celebrated within the art world and gallery scene (e.g. Basquiat). Instead, Dickens (2008; 487) called for geographers to engage with the spaces, practices and people who produce ‘post-graffiti’ worlds that show us “(graffiti and street art) practices are placed not just in the cracks of the urban fabric or the train lines, not only on the streets or in galleries, but through a diverse and shifting range of material and social contexts”. Adopting his language, I want to think about what we might call ‘post-yarnbombing worlds’ where yarnbombers have attempted to become ‘artists’ and fashion ‘careers’ and thus work in-between spaces such as the street, the art gallery, and the business world.

In taking this approach I also want to discuss, or illustrate at least, how linear narratives of yarnbombing’s radical birth to its death by neo-liberal processes ignore the nuances of what different creative practices *do* – socially and materially. This is particularly pertinent to yarnbombing, and knitters who are paid to yarnbomb like

‘Knit the City’, because craft skills and art are traditionally under-valued, sitting outside of market relations and bound up within geographies of care, love and generosity (Turney, 2014; Butcher, 2011). As Mould (2014; 536) notes, the discourse around DIY urbanisms, such as yarnbombing shapes them as “temporary, amateur, precarious, creative and crucially, inexpensive” (Mould, 2014; 536). In the case of yarnbombing, gender is important here too. Work on craft in general has not always recognised gendered dynamics as much it might (Banks, 2010). As Hughes puts it: “Academic research into craft labour in the 1970s and 1980s created a strong image of heroic masculinity, something that is not remedied by the title, “The Craftsman”, of Sennett’s (2008) most recent work. A considerable body of work into the cultural industries remains silent on issues of gender” (Hughes, 2011; 14). In looking to rectify that neglect in my account of ‘post-yarnbombing’, I want to suggest that an emphasis on the gendering of precarity in creative labour has particular pertinence.

To begin to illustrate my argument, let me revisit the work of Knit the City and a particular ‘yarnstorm’¹⁵ that I observed early in 2013. The yarnstorm took place in Brixton, London. Saatchi & Saatchi produced it for Toyota’s ‘Positive Power’ campaign; the campaign supposedly focused on ‘enabling positivity’ in Britain, and on promoting the new Toyota Prius, ‘the first car to run solely on electricity, fuel and positivity’. Toyota commissioned Knit the City for their labour, providing materials and publicity for their work.

“I arrived at Brixton early, giving myself enough time to find the yarnstorm – last time I chased a Knit the City yarnbomb, it had disappeared by the time I’d arrived. I didn’t know what to expect. I knew it was on Ferndale Road (near the tube), but I didn’t know what *that* road would be like. It was a muggy day, but the sun was breaking through. I noticed the camera crew before I spotted the yarnbomb. Stood next to a huge knitted sunshine piece, posing for pictures, were the yarnbombers who’d made ordinary bollards under a dirty bridge in Brixton into flowers. It was fun, bright and people were stopping by to take pictures and have a laugh. Equally, some people seemed non-plussed. Part of me felt like it was a bit crass to be posing for a

¹⁵ Knit the City have use the term ‘yarnstorm’ rather than ‘yarnbomb’ because of the negative connotations of ‘bomb’. It is used interchangeably to describe the act of ‘yarnbombing’ – along with terms such as guerrilla knitting, urban knitting etc..

camera crew if I'm honest, but the less cynical (or critical) part thought why not? It's nice to have knitters getting press and media representation beyond Shreddies knitting nanas".

(Knit the City, Fieldnotes, February 2013).



Figure 6.6: *Knit the City, Brixton yarnstorm, Author's own.*

There is a tension then, as yarnbombing gains popularity, visibility, and profitability with knitting as free, unproductive labour, that not only exists outside of capitalist regimes but *resists* them with its core values of care, community, friendship (Gibson-Graham, 2004). However, as Cox (2012; 495) argues: “it must be remembered that care activities outside market relations are not unproblematic or ‘caring’ in some pure way. Imaginings of them as such can be based on essentialised portrayals of women as selfless and naturally caring”. In other words, we have to wary of assuming that paid yarnbombing is caring *less* or being *less* transgressive because of its engagement in market relations. Rather, yarnbombing that is paid for reflects the status of female artists, their creative labour and the movement of domestic craft into the public sphere and between multiple publics (fans, documenters, publishers and institutions, as well as wider publics and the practitioners themselves – see Dickens, 2008).

As Pasquinelli and Sjöholm (2015; 3) note, “precarity, freelancing, and entrepreneurship are key features of artists’ and other creative workers’ search for resilient paths throughout their professional lives” (Pasquinelli and Sjöholm, 2015). This precarity requires creative workers to work with uncertainty, make their

presence known ‘on the scene’ and encourages practices of self-promotion (McRobbie, 2013). As a result, spaces such as the artist’s studio become of material and physical import as some (female artists especially) manage both caring responsibilities with creative pursuits (Bain, 2005; Sjöholm, 2013). I am keen here to resist naturalising discourses of knitting as caring, or indeed assuming that precarity and neoliberal practices should be taken as given. Rather, I hope to illustrate how the particular material and social qualities of yarnbombing, or knitted interventions, develop our understanding of post-graffiti worlds and require geographers to pay attention to the nuances of creative practices in the construction narratives of co-option or, to put it bluntly, “selling out”.

In thinking about post-yarnbombing, we need to recognise that not all creative practices are equally valued, and knitting and crochet much less so than many other forms of creativity. Knitting historically has taken place at home, in domestic space and the development of artistic and interventionist movements like yarnbombing signal its move into ‘the public arena’ (Braitsch and Brush, 2011; Wallace, 2013). As I explored in Chapter Five, the labour and time taken to ‘make’ knitted projects is universally undervalued (as both amateur and professional creativities). In this context then, the professionalization of yarnbombing and the visibility, popularity and profitability of Knit the City and Deadly Knitshade becomes more complex to judge across different sets of values and geographies.

Certainly, many fellow crafters were concerned. As one knitter who ‘resisted professionalization’ or ‘selling out’ commented:

“We ended up on the television together, Knit the City and I. We talked about using it (knitting) in schools and my own yarnbombing. I mean, when I was there, and it was a realisation... I mean, I was just doing it for fun, but then I met Knit the City, and I guess they’re just playing a different game – they’re really good at promotion, you know, especially with Twitter. They’re basically businesses, and, “hats off to them” I say – it’s her business now. But it’s a different experience for me. I’m not commercial. This isn’t my job.”

(Interview with Yarnbomber¹⁶, March, 2013).

¹⁶ This particular identity has been anonymised on request of the yarnbomber.

Robertson (2011; 186) asks: “is it possible that the political effectiveness of radical craft practice relies inherently on the gendering of textile work? Is it possible, in other words, that knitting, embroidery, and quilting [being] used to make political change in some spheres requires their subjugation in others?” Here Robertson highlights the way that knitting can both empower and disempower congruently: for some it is leisure, and for others work. Less examined has been the juxtaposition of amateur and professional ‘craftivism’: what may be fun, whimsical and playful for some may be precarious creative labour for others. Moreover, these different economies are not juxtaposed but connected. Knit the City depends on the existence of amateur worlds of creativity characterised as “fun, caring, or playful” to provide affective social and political potential to their work. The situation is indeed, knotted (or knitted) particularly as more professional practitioners like Knit the City, or the knitting street artist Olek that I will introduce next, continued to be cited as both inspirational and *aspirational* by knitters I interviewed in this process.



Figure 6.7: Yarnbombing with London Kaye, New York. Author's own.

“It’s like ultimately, I would *love* to wake up and be able to crochet for a living. I *love* making street art, and I *love* working on new projects. If I could spend more time on that, than working at my current job (in Apple) to support it, I would. In the past I’ve helped ‘Olek’ on her projects, and she’s just an inspiration. I would *love* to be able to build a career like hers.”

(Interview with London Kaye, New York, March 2014).

This quote comes from London Kaye, a yarnbomber, based in Williamsburg, New York City. As part of an undergraduate fieldtrip to New York that I was helping to lead, students and I met with Kaye and went yarnbombing with her. Kaye cited the work of textile artist and yarnbomber Olek as an inspiration. I had encountered Olek’s work in both the UK and US. Her visibility and acclaim illustrates yarnbombing as an international phenomena. Olek’s work is recognizable by its use of camouflage, bold, contrasting colours, and the abundant, complete coverage of statues, bodies and rooms with crochet. Indeed, Olek’s installation *I do not expected to be a mother, but I do expect to die alone* was the first exhibition I encountered during this research process in 2012. Olek, crocheted a ‘bedroom’ scenario in Tony’s Gallery, Shoreditch. Everything: the bed, dressing room table, an ironing board, was completely covered in crochet in a camouflage effect. It was a commentary on home, domestic life and a historically ‘domestic craft’ (Greenhalg, 1995). Through over-abundance, over-making, over-stimulation of the senses (sight, smell, feel), home seemed to be *un-made* (Brickell, 2011) or rather *made* unrecognizable. And this was done through the domestic practices of crochet.

On the patterned and textural affordances of camouflage, Forysth (2013; 1038) notes, “consideration of the surficial qualities of camouflage raises interesting questions about the visual and the hidden, the observer and the observed.” Olek’s practice centres on these issues of what is seen and what is hidden. In particular, she looks to question assumptions about women’s work and labour. Firstly, then, the over-production of a traditionally domestic craft is deployed to un-make domestic space. Secondly, camouflage, a practice of concealment, becomes a practice of revelation. Olek crocheted text messages from former boyfriends and lovers into the walls of the room. In doing so, she made the intimate and the personal open for

consumption in a pattern, camouflage, usually associated with concealment, through a medium historically associated with domestic love. Thirdly, all of this complicates assumptions about space, practices, people and their place in the city. In these *gendered, crafted*, post-graffiti, post-yarnbombing worlds, domestic craft becomes art, art becomes domestic craft, street art enters gallery space, street walls become gallery spaces for artists, and so on. Such processes, I suggest, complicate linear narratives of the ‘co-option’ of creative practices into neo-liberalisation and commodity worlds. These are *precarious* geographies that tell stories of, in Dickens (2008) terms, post-yarnbombing worlds and the value of women’s creative labour.



Figure 6.8: I do not expect to be a mother, but I do expect to die alone. Olek, Tony's Gallery, Shoreditch, Author's own.



*Figure 6.9: "If men could get pregnant, abortion would be sacrament"
at Stolen Space Gallery. Author's Own.*



Figure 6.10: 'Let's not get caught, let's keep going'. Olek, Trueman Brewery, Author's own.

The lifespan of yarn intervention: transience, waste and renewal

Having addressed the broader politics of the yarnbombing scene, I turn now to focus on the more everyday and material politics of yarnbombing practice itself. In doing so, I focus on the 'production' or *making of* yarnbombs within the sorts of amateur creative practices that I have suggested both produce, and are produced by, 'leading' yarnbombers like Knit the City. The affective worlds of this amateur yarnbombing continue to develop imaginaries of what yarnbombing *is* and *does* in urban spaces as a convivial, community minded practice (Edensor and Millington, 2009). Empirically, I introduce the amateur yarnbombers 'Knitchings' and 'Purlqueens' and revisit the Carers U Knitted group, in order to explore (or '*follow*', as Cook *et al* (2003) puts it) the spaces, practices and people involved in the production, repair and maintenance of yarnbombs.

Not everyone appreciates yarnbombing:

“We’re all for beautifying public spaces. But yarn bombing is little more than a nuisance. It gets wet and grimy after the first rainstorm, insulating perfectly functional handrails and bike racks in a tube of mildew and mould. And for what -- covering up perfectly attractive tree trunks with twee stripes? Do trees really need to be any more beautiful?”

(Excerpt from ‘Trends we hope die in 2013’ from CityLab website. Accessed:<http://www.citylab.com/design/2012/12/urban-trends-we-hope-die-2013/4240/>)

In the act of yarnbombing, narratives of utility, waste and function are multiple. The above excerpt from ‘CityLab’ describes yarnbombing as a ‘nuisance’. This, I argue, reflects three particular notions of waste that have wider prominence in thinking about yarnbombing. Firstly, yarnbombing is seen as a material ‘waste’ of wool, yarns and fibre. Secondly, the very materiality of yarnbombing is that, if left in situ, objects begin to materially ‘waste away’, as fibres degrade, decay and lose their colour and texture in the process. Finally, yarnbombing evokes ‘waste’ as a seemingly ‘*wasteful*’ act of labour that defies utility, logic and function through unproductive labour and whimsical aesthetics (Butcher, 2011; Mann, 2015).

Alongside this, during research with the knitters who produced yarnbombs, I discovered *quiet* narratives of re-use and waste. Craft is attentive to the life-cycle of goods, objects and materials – sometimes, extending to the act of repair and mending (Carr and Gibson, 2015; DeSilvey, 2013). It sits within a wider array of what Hawkins calls ‘the arts of transience’, in that it “is to be able to cultivate a care and sensibility” for waste to *become* something else (Hawkins, 2001; 21). In particular, amateur yarnbombing often involves the re-use of old knitting and other ‘waste materials’. Knitting as a form of craft consumption involves the collection of yarns, fibres and notions; or to put it more bluntly, often the ‘over collection’ of yarns, fibres and notions. Collection is an important practice for crafters, hobbyists

and craft consumers (Campbell, 2005). Within knitting circles, crafters refer to their mass of fibre, yarns and wool as “stash”. As Stalph and Winge (2008; 1999) note:

“Establishing and managing a stash is normal activity for a handcrafter pursuing his/her chosen domestic art, but the stash and making use of the stash is sometimes viewed as deviant by non-handcrafting outsiders, particularly those who share living space with handcrafters, or perhaps knew the handcrafter before he or she became involved with handcrafting activities. Having a stash legitimates a handcrafter’s identity, but often causes tension with non-crafting others.”

More generally, there is, in the world, much knitting or fibre which is perhaps unwanted. Often knitting is understood as representative of love, warmth, cosiness and comfort but this can be too much, so that it *smothers* rather than comforts (Turney, 2014). As a result knitted items appear often in charity shops, car boot sales, eBay and fairs – items disinvested by those who no longer need or want them (Crewe, 2011). But these items can also provide inspiration, and / or resources for further collection, used by others who may be able to give these objects new ‘lives’ (DeLyser, 2015). For amateur knitters, yarnbombing has provided a utility for unwanted knitting and yarns. Moreover, these unwanted knits and fibres provide resources for ad-hoc or improvisational creativity (see, Ingold and Hallam, 2007) as knitters think ‘how can I use this?’ in their local environment. Yarnbombing fashions a space for displays of amateur creativity in the city. Rather than seeing yarnbombing as a wasteful form of production that messes up the city with future detritus,, I illustrate how yarnbombing is thrifty, humorous and generous to amateur creativity and alternative tastes – though, at the same time, this exists in a tension of debates around craft and utility (Adamson, 2007).

Kath Hitchings, aka ‘Knitchings’, is part of the ‘Knitting Ne’er De Wells’¹⁷ collective in Farnham, Surrey just outside of London. The ‘Knitting Ne’er De Well’s helped to produce the decorations and yarnbombing at Unravel festival that I mentioned in Chapter Four. They have a fluctuating, open membership but Kath usually acts as organiser for the group, as well as producing ‘solo’ knits. Kath has an affinity

¹⁷ Names unchanged at request of participant.

towards re-use, or making use, of neglected and unwanted yarn and knits. This is apparent in a number of her yarnbombing projects. For example, one of her projects involved second-hand crocheted hats that she had acquired, and that she and the group placed on every public statue of a human figure in the English town of Ipswich, with the intention of ‘breathing new life into forgotten public art that no one seems to care about’ (Kath Hitchings, Interview, February 2013). As she elaborates:

“I went to a jumble sale and I found a large stash of crocheted Tam O Shantas¹⁸ and I thought ‘oh, I’ve got to, haven’t I?’ So I just put them away and didn’t think anything of it – then a few days later I had a few friends round for a glass of wine and we’re all a bit wacky. I thought couldn’t we do something with these hats – like a ‘happening’ – couldn’t we put them on every statue in Ipswich?”

(Interview with Kath Hitchings, 2013).

Kath and the Knitting Ne’er Do Wells not only looked out for knits and yarn to re-use, they were often donated it. In this they were not alone. A number of the yarnbombers that I met with described a similar process of material acquisition and recycling:

“I ended up with hundreds and hundreds of balls of wool that somebody was going to put onto a landfill site. It was a friend’s dad who told me, he worked at the tip, and he had seven bags full of wool that they were just going to get rid off. So my friend brought them to my birthday party for me to take it home. It was wonderful, because there was enough orange and blue to make the ‘Shoe Zone yarnbomb’.”

(Interview with Kath Hitchings, 2013)

“One guy came in the other day came in and he said: ‘You know I’ve got all this yarn that used to belong to my mum? She used to knit jumpers all the time, and now she’s passed away I’ve got no idea what to do with it’. So he donated it to our yarnbombing collective, and now it’s had this new lease of

¹⁸ A traditional Scottish bonnet, usually worn by men.

life.”

(Interview with Debbie, Purlqueens, March 2014)

“We’d just been given a huge collection of hideous knitted goods by this eccentric older lady – it was, well, crap! She wanted it to be sold for charity, but it was just the most ghastly, bizarre knitting ever. It was wonderful in its ugliness. I mean - it was wonderfully bad and really funny. There was like, these ‘knitted eyes’ – I can’t even fully explain how crap it was. I mean, normally it’s poor premature babies at the receiving end of overbearing knits, but anyway - we thought - we can use this! That way we’re not producing loads of stuff. We can re-use it.”

(Interview with Kath Hitchings, February 2013)

Hawkins (2010; 812) has explored the “fluidity and potentiality of the rubbish materials” in geographies of art but less has been written on the aesthetic, and interventionist potential, of amateur creativities engaged in arts of transience. There is much knitting in the world that is unwanted; a reflection, perhaps, on knitting as a generous ‘gift-giving’. Its re-use in yarnbombing speaks to wider issues of ethics and aesthetics. Ethically, yarnbombers like Kath saw re-use as part of a sustainable relationship to material production and consumption, parallel to the ‘menders movement’, and a distancing from the disposable ethics of mainstream consumerism (in the context of disposing of these items in the yarnbombing process). Aesthetically, such re-use often goes hand in hand with transformations of symbolic value. Kath’s relationship materials often seemed to work through the lens of ‘kitsch’ (see also DeLyser, 2015); devalued, tasteless, ‘crap’ items being given new value through collection and artistic deployment.

In a fascinating yarnbombing project Kath foregrounded these issues of taste and value. You may have spotted her mention, in one of the interview extracts above, of her ‘Shoe Zone yarnbomb’. Shoe Zone is a discount of shoe shops in the UK High Street (they also stock bags and some other accessory items). They are well known for their somewhat garish store design and branding, deploying bright blue and orange colours. Using wool donated by a friend, whose father worked on a land-fill rubbish tip and had recovered the yarn from there, Kath knitted a range of branded

goods in the Shoe Zone colours and with the Shoe Zone logo (see Figure 6.11). As Kath makes clear, this was a wider aesthetic intervention into the classed landscapes of British retail culture:

“The whole Shoezone yarnbombing project has been about **turning ugly stuff into something beautiful**. I mean, it was just fun, you know. We made these orange and blue ‘fashion items’ – it’s just fun, it’s like we subverted this ordinary brand, that’s for ordinary people by making it seem like more ridiculous brands everyone buys into, like ‘Jack Wills’ – so you know, it’s like if we can make ugly Shoezone beautiful, and we can do that with knitting, well....”

(Interview with Kath Hitchings, February, 2013. Emphasis added.)



Figure 6.11: The Shoe Zone yarnbomb, Knitchings. Author's own.

Kath's practices of re-use illustrate the possibilities of life and value beyond the 'death' of objects (Gregson *et al*, 2013). Through her yarnbombing of statues with unwanted crochet hats, to the yarnbombing of her local 'Shoe Zone' to make a

commentary on the state of the contemporary high-street in austere times, Kath shows how the act of yarnbombing is one of finding new lives, trajectories, and new creative geographies for both discarded, or dis-invested, knits and spaces. Yarnbombing is as much about materially re-working knits as it is about re-working the geographies of generosity, care and conviviality that produced them, or can be produced by their placement. Furthermore, there is another level of politics at play here – of aesthetics, taste and what counts as ‘crap’ knitting. Yarnbombing itself has sometimes been deemed *naïf*, or not ‘proper’ knitting. Such judgements draw on a number of intersecting criteria: utility, technical quality and aesthetic taste for example. There are, then, complex judgements formed about the value and material presence of yarnbombing as a convivial, vernacular creativity (cf. Edensor and Millington (2008) and their work on Christmas lights).

For me, contra CityLab’s distaste for yarnbombs’ material decay with which I began this section, yarnbombing is rarely solely about beautification. Its enlivening presence goes hand in hand with an aesthetic of urban decay (more generally, see Edensor, 2006; Edensor, 2012; Edensor and DeSilvey, 2010). Therefore woollen decay, if it occurs before removal, is not so much a failure of the yarnbomb as it is part of how yarnbombing re-performs the biographies of its knitted materials.

Transient street art: re-making rules, materials and spaces

“Graffiti, as a transgressive performance in space, tells us much of the ways space is configured, constructed and reproduced in the city”, write McAuliffe and Iveson (2011; 129). One central component of this spatial configuration involves legality and the policing of urban space. Like Cresswell (1996), McAuliffe and Iveson suggest that there is a pervasive sense of assumed “generalised criminality and anti-social behaviour” associated with those who produce graffiti (2011; 128). This may over-simplify the relations between authority and subversive creativity in a post-graffiti world -- as the various attempts to remove, preserve, commodify or otherwise deal with Banksy’s street art demonstrate – but it is true that for street art questions of removal are as important as those of production (Schacter, 2008). Graffiti artists, and urban interventionists more generally, have become skilled in extended the lives of their art, performances or displays through photography and

video. Less written, however, are stories of *material* extension of creative urban interventions. These are an important part of the yarnbombing biography.

In this section, then, I explore the social and material practices of ‘maintaining’ and repairing yarnbombs thus attending to the ‘transience’ of these knitted objects in multiple senses. As I have begun to illustrate, knitters have a propensity to work with ‘arts of transience’ and the multiple possibilities and potentialities of what objects can become. In extending that analysis, firstly, I engage with the material practice of extending the lives of yarnbombs by knitters, and secondly, I explore the complex geographies of authorship and investment which produce these practices.

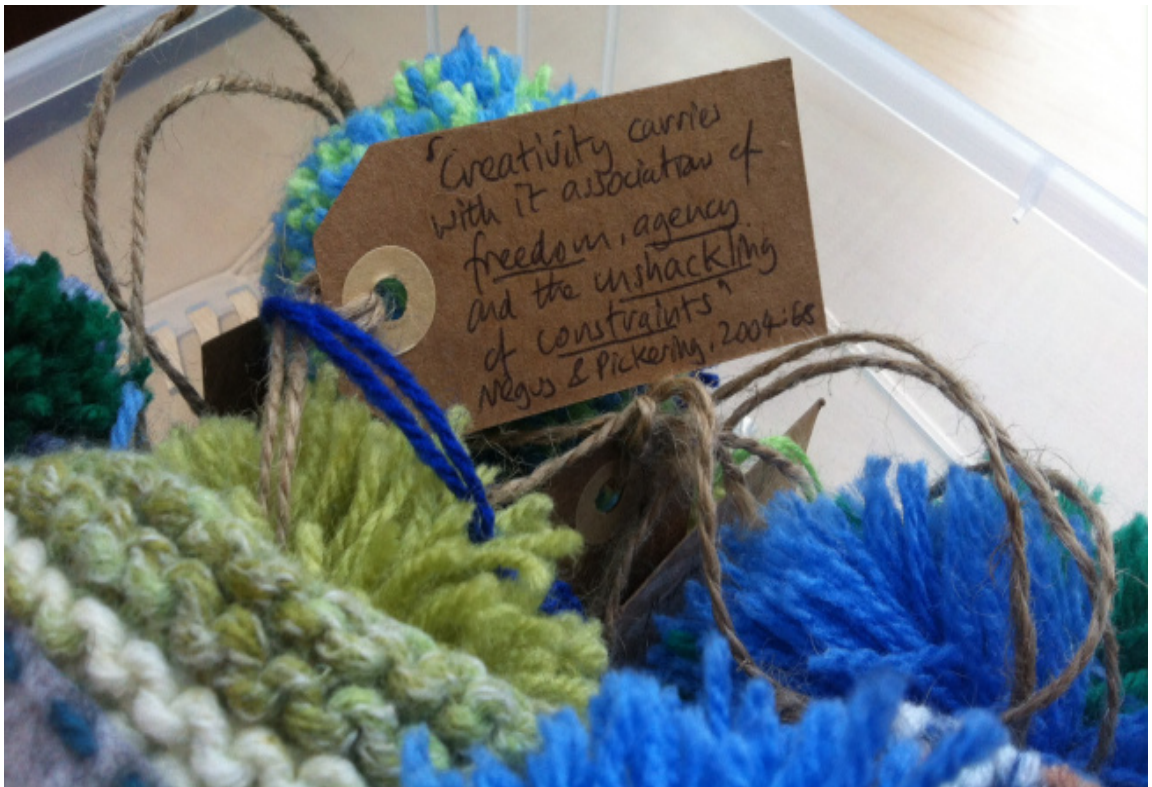


Figure 6.12: Pom-Poms produced by students, Royal Holloway University of London. Author's own.

There are various informal rules that shape yarnbombing as creative intervention; and these are enacted in different times and spaces. As part of my teaching on a course on ‘Creative Geographies’ for third year undergraduate students, I arranged for the class to make knitted ‘pom-poms’ and to yarnbomb the Geography building. Given this was an activity involving undergraduate students I sought, and

gained, permission from the Head of Department. What I did not anticipate was the negative feedback from ‘the knitting world’ when the project was shared via Twitter and my personal blog. Here is an exemplary tweet from ‘MaryBlackCat’:

“what a shame the actual yarn bombing was so RUBBISH. BTW if its got permission it ain’t yarnbombing.” (@MaryBlackCat, 2013, Twitter)

Like many social movements, yarnbombing has a diverse and varied set of informal rules and rituals. These have, in part, been formalised by DIY or ‘how-to’ manuals (see Moore and Prain, 2009; Knitshade, 2011); but they are also subject to continual negotiation and re-working dependent on the event, or cause, for which they are brought into being. Two particular ‘rules’ are often cited: the notion that yarnbombing should be ‘left in the landscape’; and the suggestion that knitting should be anonymous and permission must not be sought. Despite MaryBlackCat’s helpful advice, it is the first of these that interests me here.

“Guerrilla knitting or ‘yarnstorming’ is the art of conjuring up a piece of knitting or crochet, taking it out in the world, releasing it into the wild, and running away like a mad thing.”

(Knit the City, 2015. Source: www.knitthecity.com)

As mentioned in Chapter 5, the Warrington based knitting group Carers U Knitted also partook in some yarnbombing. Diana from the group was aware of, and a little ambivalent about, the expectation that yarnbombs should be left in situ and to their own fate:

“I mean, yeah, the point has always been, if you leave yarnbombing out in the open, likely people will nick bits of it, that’s the point of it. Some of the work I’ve seen pictures of recently... they’ve been beautiful, and when you think, someone’s done that, and it’s beautiful and they’ve walked away from it. I think I would find it hard, if I’d done all that work to produce something, and for all you know someone could go at it with scissors the next day.”

(Interview, Diana from Carers U Knitted, November 2013)

Let me introduce another case study too, at this point: 'PurlQueens', a yarnbombing collective in Folkestone, Kent. The group is primarily led by artist, Debbie – who co-ordinates town-wide group projects such as the 'Knitted Bollards' and 'Remembrance Road' projects that I will discuss below. Membership is varied and large. Much like Sue at Carers U Knitted, Debbie also collects "all sorts of knits" produced for the project and often works them into large-scale installations. As part of the 'Knitted Bollards' project, the PurlQueens had made seventy-five knitted and crocheted covers for bollards in Folkestone town centre. They represented months of individual and collaborative labour. In the end, the vast majority had gone 'within days':

"The knitting we made for the bollards, literally we put seventy five out and within a couple of days they had gone! I mean, they were only supposed to stay in the month of June and it was a shame because it took a couple of months for people to make them, people put loads of detail on them, they were incredible! So that's the only downside. Sometimes they will get stolen. But that's the only time. I've put flowers on the seafront before and they've not been touched – maybe the odd flower – so I don't really know what happened. I don't know whether people were spiteful, or if they liked them so much they stole them. But the way I look at it is – *I* chose to put them out there, and whatever happens to them happens.... It would be nice for them to stay longer. A couple of the newer PurlQueens did get really upset when they disappeared quickly, but I said, at the end of the day you can't afford to be precious about it. You're putting things in a public arena so you have to plan for that, be prepared, otherwise knitting wouldn't leave the house."

(Interview with Debbie, Purlqueens, March, 2014)

As noted above, Melissa Butcher (2011) has argued that yarnbombing is a gift to the city, unproductive labour for which nothing is expected in return. However, as Barnett (2005; 13) highlights, "as soon as a gift is given knowingly as a gift, the subject of generosity is always anticipating a return, already taking credit of some sort, if only for being generous." To this extent, though yarnbombing is framed as generous, convivial and gifted creative practices there are complex emotional

geographies (pride, hope, disappointment or dismay) to navigate that some yarnbombers may find hard to accept as part of the creative process. This seemed to be felt most by less-experienced knitters, for whom the production process had been time-consuming. Indicatively, some of ‘my’ third year students felt ‘really worried’ about the safety of their pom-poms in the Departmental lobby.

As more skilled knitters, both Diana and Debbie were accepting of the transience of their yarnbombs – citing it as necessary ‘else knitting wouldn’t leave the house’. However, Carers U Knitted employed tactics to prolong the temporalities of their work, but in a way that reflects yarnbombing as an act of community and conviviality. Their own yarnbombing was often done as a means to promote or support the Carers’ Centre in which they were based:

“The yarnbombs we’ve done at the Carers’ Centre are not just for our knitting group to enjoy, it’s the other groups who use the building too. Other people get the pleasure of seeing them. It’s about other people *sharing it*. We’re hoping with the yarnbombing, that it might draw attention to the centre. Like, someone passing by might be like, “Oh what’s that for? It’s a carers’ centre”. Then they might twig, “Well actually, I’m a carer – I could use help”. It’s one of those things people don’t recognise in themselves; that they are carers. People just think, “Oh I just look after my husband, that’s all”. So if it pulls someone into the building, because we’ve decorated it with our knitting, then they might get the help they need. I mean - if we decorate that big tree outside, no one’s *not* going to notice that.”

(Interview, Diana from Carers U Knitted, November 2013).



Figure 6.13: Carers U Knitted Yarnbomb, Warrington. Author's own.

Carers U Knitted connect their yarnbombs, materially and politically, to the Carers' Centre. I think we see here what Horton and Kraftl (2009; 19) have termed 'implicit activism' – "activisms here are understood as imperceptible mo(ve)ments of modestly political intent". I would argue that the knitting produced by Carer's U Knitted represents just such activism, "which are politicised, affirmative and potentially transformative, but which are modest, quotidian, and precede with little fanfare" (ibid.). The production of the yarnbomb featured in Figure 6.13, is, I suggest, a textured, tactile representation of quiet, banal material practices of caring that take place in the knitting group. But through its material form, the yarnbomb contradicts the suggestion that implicit activism should 'leave little trace' (Horton and Kraftl, 2009; 21). Carers U Knitted have found a colourful, convivial way to

represent the microgeographies of their group. For this reason the preservation and protection of the yarnbomb became important:

“We also wanted to leave it up but they thought all the drunks at night going into town might have messed with it – we brought it in of an evening, so it would be safe. I think initially with yarnbombing, the idea was to go out in ‘the dead of night’ and no one knows who has made it. But to be honest, I don’t go with that theory. If I’ve spent all that time doing it - I want someone to know that I’ve done it! I don’t want to sneak away like I’m Warrington’s answer to Banksy!”

(Interview with Sue, Carers U Knitted, November 2013)

The preservation of the yarnbomb (and subsequent yarnbombs conducted by the group) is important because it both represents *and* promotes the experience of carers who belong to Carers U Knitted. Sue also highlights another rule of yarnbombing that has been re-negotiated by these knitters – the notion that yarnbombing should take place ‘at the dead of night’. Though this rule seems to be connotative of protecting anonymity and the playfulness of yarnbombing as a creative practice, Sue also compares this renegotiation to more masculine and visible practices of graffiti, highlighted by her reference to Banksy. In this sense then, another ‘implicit activism’ of yarnbombing is the way it playfully re-casts urban subversions from the heroic, spectacular and frankly self-congratulatory rhetoric that reinforce masculinist geographies under the guise of emancipatory practice (see, for example, Garratt, 2010; Garratt, 2011; Garratt, 2012; Garratt, 2013).

The question of the temporality of yarnbombs is not limited to issues of preservation and protection. It also involves practices of repair and maintenance. The PurlQueens illustrate the point. As their co-ordinator, Debbie, mentioned in the interview extract above, some PurlQueens found the ephemerality of their labour difficult to accept, and in particular were upset by the ‘stealing’ or ‘damage’ to yarnbombs. But of course, it is not only such human agency that marks the transience of the yarnbomb in public space. There are more-than-human agencies, particularly, “shifting processes of decay and mutation” that transform matter and destabilise these objects (Edensor, 2013; 246):

“I guess it does get to a point, like the sign up in the street, that sign is going to have to come down because it’s starting to look really grubby now. But I like that decay, you know in everyday life things aren’t perfect all the time and it’s nice to record that decay. And then, it can be taken off. I mean my seafront yarnbombs, I mean, they’re up for renewal soon, I’m gonna go there soon and just take them all off and just put something fresh up and new there.”

(Interview with Debbie, PurlQueens, February 2014)



Figure 6.14: 'Women hold up half the sky', PurlQueens, Folkestone.

Author's own.

As well as these practices of renewal Debbie also considers the durability of the yarns that she uses:

“I’ve found that acrylic doesn’t fade as quickly as wool. I blend a lot of wools. But I don’t tend to use real wool in yarnbombing because they fade very

quickly. So I tend to use acrylic. Not only is it cheap, but also it's more colourful. I mean, I have had criticism: people saying, 'You leave the yarnbombs up too long, they look tatty'. Some people didn't like that I'd left yarnbombs up there from before, so with the poppies I left them up from the previous year. But I like the decay – it tells stories about a place, about the landscape”

(Interview with Debbie, Purlqueens, February 2014)



Figure 6.15: Surviving Bollard, Folkestone. Author's own.

As DeSilvey (2006; 320) puts it, “decay reveals itself not (only) as erasure but as a process that can be generative of a different kind of knowledge”; so the materially decaying yarnbombing offers different affective geographies to those that still retain their colour, or cosy texture. By allowing yarnbombs to materially decay, I feel, Debbie hoped to illustrate the elemental practices and processes that *materially* produce Folkestone, and therein, ‘how they matter’. Jackson and Fannin (2012; 436) have suggested that, ‘if matter speaks, we need to tool our senses such that we learn to listen to its multiple and interrelated voices”. Yarnbombing is already a more-than-human co-production with fibre, yarns and wools. However, this becomes

expanded further when, left exposed to environmental process, it tells the story of place in vibrant ways (Bennett, 2010). Of course, this story is still subject to aesthetic judgement and practice:



Figure 6.16: Remembrance Road, Folkestone. Author's own.

“There is a fine line between decay and between it looking totally scraggy and it needed to come down. There’s a fine line between something looking interesting and something looking ‘*urgh*’ and it needs replacing. There’s a responsibility that when it’s looking grubby you should go and take it down if it’s not gone. In the context of the Road of Remembrance I think they look okay at the moment. But, later on this year I am going to take all of them

down and I'm going to wash them ahead of the centenary; and of course, new ones will join them and they can all go up together.”

(Interview with Debbie, Purlqueens, February 2014)

Although Debbie was committed to displaying, or at least working with, decay there were times that these processes had to be negated. As with the tactics of preservation employed by Carers U Knitted, so too PurlQueens employed tactics of repair and maintenance for their particular knitted installation, ‘Remembrance Road’. Their concern for the state of this knitting was particularly acute given the subject matter of the intervention. During World War One, the road on which this intervention was made led soldiers to Folkestone Harbour to embark for France; as Debbie puts it, “for some, it was their last experience of home, so I think its important to commemorate such a horrible loss of live with a homely craft”. Maintenance here is also a mark of respect. Thorogood (2015) has highlighted the material politics of commemorative ‘paper poppy’ production. As he puts it, “it’s not just normal paper they produce. It has to be waterproof to stop the colours running into people’s clothes. It has to be biodegradable, since after November 11th nobody wants the floors littered with poppies. It’s no longer legal to cast wreaths into rivers due to pollution. This affects naval remembrance ceremonies. The materialities of these objects speak back to and influence remembrance practices”. Debbie wanted to harness the material properties of wool, yarn and knitted fabric to reflect the “touch, comfort and warmth of home”; in doing so the decaying poppies became problematic and required mending, maintenance and repair. It was also evident that Diane felt the ‘knitted medium’ spoke to a continuum of histories, memories and stories on the role of women and their knitted efforts during World War One¹⁹.

To conclude this section on the ‘transient street art’ of yarnbombing, I have sought to illustrate the material practices and production of ‘yarnbombs’ and the politics of transience, decay, maintenance and repair that knitters undertake. These, I argue, demonstrate a commitment to material re-use, the value of waste and in doing so articulate ‘implicit activism’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). So far, in the spirit of

¹⁹ In 2014, “The Knitting Reference Library” at Southampton University ran an exhibition “Knitting 1914-2014: Making Connections” with an accompanying symposium that explored the extensive range of materials related to knitting and production in WW1 and WW2. See here: <https://blog.soton.ac.uk/plustex/knitting-1914-2014-making-connections/>

‘implicit activism’, I have avoided becoming tangled in debates over ‘isms’ – notably, feminism. I did so, so I could explore the more everyday, banal, material politics of making and maintaining yarnbombs. I avoided subscribing knitted street art as a practice “principally understood as relevant only in as much as that it is either a microcosm of, or else aspires to become, a social movement” (Horton and Kraftl, 2009; 16). As Kelly (2014; 123) puts it, “there are still important questions about the conditions under which knitting represents intentional engagement with feminist activism”. Whilst I would argue that the knitting I have discussed, in this section, is shaped by particular feminist ethics of care and collaboration (Pratt, 2010), almost none of the knitters I interviewed *intentionally* subscribed to ‘feminism’ as a political project that shaped their work. However, I now want to explore how questions of ephemerality, transience and the potential development of knitting into feminist strategies is pursued by some yarnbombers, taking as my case study a project focused on the reclaiming of space for women’s histories and memories.

Crocheting memories: women and the representation of neglected histories



Figure 6.17: Poster: *The Stature Project. Manchester. With permission.*

In 2013, Jenny White and Helen Davies formed “Warp and Weft”: an arts, crafts and heritage initiative celebrating diverse lives and voices. Their first project was ‘Stature’ held at Manchester Town Hall (with permission) in February 2014.

The aim of 'The Stature Project' was to celebrate women of Manchester who had contributed to the social, cultural and political production of the city. White and Davies selected women who they felt (and who had) been overlooked by processes of memorialisation and commemoration in the city.

"We were thinking of ways to respond to the media – it's about equality, you know, suffragette legacy. I think, because we live and work in the city centre, we walk around and it's just statues of men, and celebrations of men's achievements. And we wanted to redress the balance of male lives being celebrated – and this is contrasted to the images of females you get surrounded by in the city centre – you know women on billboards. It's like, the historic legacy of women's role or treatment in the city isn't represented."

(Interview with Warp and Weft, February 2014)

As Pollock (1988) suggests, "demanding that women be considered, not only changes what is studied and what becomes relevant to investigate, but it challenges the existing disciplines politically." Though the Stature Project was about redressing the balance of male and female lives celebrated in the city, it was, I hope to illustrate, also a process of challenging the material and creative practices with which to do so – bringing knitting and crochet to the fore as a particular form of *making* representations in so doing. Warp and Weft attempted, as Hawkins (2014; 65) puts it, "material and meaningful making that is less concerned to engage with the particularities of people and place, than it is to explore the creative fabrication of biography, and what it means to embroider material and imaginative connections between people, places and things".

Janice Monk (1992; 126), in her research on commemorative statues in cities, argued that "conveyed to us in the urban landscapes of Western Societies is a heritage of masculine power, accomplishment and heroism; women are largely invisible, present occasionally if they enter the male sphere of politics of militarism. Even representation of these women may only be achieved when other women work together to support construction". The lack of memorial statues of women -- with the exceptions of those few born into power, such as Queen Victoria, or those used as allegorical figures, such as the Statue of Liberty -- reflects, Monk (1992) argues, the lack of value placed on women's achievements. Warp and Weft's Stature Project

sought to address this gendered materiality of public memorial sculpture through the material practice of yarnbombing.



Figure 6.18: Masks on the busts at Manchester Town Hall. Image Author's own.

In total, Warp and Weft produced eight masks of eight inspirational, or aspirational, women of Manchester²⁰. These women had diverse identities that highlighted not just neglect of gendered commemoration in urban spaces, but neglect of diverse sexualities, and working class women. Warp and Weft worked with fragments and ‘small stories’ (Lorimer, 2003) from archives, to piece together representations and biographies of the women they were attempting to represent.

“I’m not using skin colour so it doesn’t matter, but yeah it’s kind of like I couldn’t anyway because some of them²¹... like Esther Roper she never had

²⁰ There were eight women included in this project. These included: Louise da-Cocodia, Kathleen Mary Drew-Baker, Elizabeth Gaskell, Annie Horniman, Ethel ‘Sunny’ Lowry, Dame Kathleen Ollerenshaw, Sylvia Pankhurst and Esther Roper.

²¹ Esther Roper was a social justice campaigner who fought for working class women’s rights by helping to establish trade unions. Esther was the partner of Irish poet Eva Gore-Booth and in 1916 they established *Uranian Magazine*, which explored lesbian, gay and trans-issues.

her picture taken in profile it was always, like, she was always ‘looking somewhere’ – but I guess no one else knows what she looks like either. But that’s not the point. It’s more about celebrating the women themselves, than it being a realistic portrait.” (Warp and Weft, Interview, November 2013)

Generally, I have been arguing that practices and processes of precarity and transience shape knitted interventions. In this section, I want to extend that focus into a concern with *ephemerality*. I use this term to convey both temporariness and a certain ungraspable quality, the materialisation of an absence (whereas transience conveys better moves between states). The Stature project was concerned with how the absence of women’s personal histories in urban landscapes can be explored, intervened with, and creatively re-cast through the medium of crochet. Tellingly, crochet itself is a craft that fashions something from almost nothing, comprising “the creation of a surface through the looping and entwining of a single thread, a precarious act that creates strength, but can equally unravel and fall apart” (Turney, 2014; 26).

Monk (1992; 125) has suggested that one of few women to be habitually represented in (western) urban landscapes is Queen Victoria. Monk (1992; 125) notes, “the stern figure of Queen Victoria in the square which bears her name in Sydney, presents her complete with orb and spectre, the symbol of empire and colonial power. It bears little relation to the woman herself – one who chose to wear the black dress and bonnet of widowhood to the celebration of the jubilee of her reign though others were garbed in ceremonial dress”. Warp and Weft, rather, wanted to explore the potential of crochet as a tool to represent ‘personalities’:

“We didn’t want the masks to look exactly like them (the women). That’s not the point of this medium – it’s about showcasing the sculptural qualities of the crochet stitches as well as their face and identities”.

(Warp and Weft, Interview, February 2014).

“It’s impossible to make it look exactly like the person, it’s a bit cartoonish. I’ve used a lot of bright colours, sequins etc. The stitches are quite square and sort of bulky and you’re just never going to get an exact likeness of someone’s

face with that. People might be expecting a full sized mask, but it's more, you know, a representation of the women's personality."

(Warp and Weft, Interview, November 2013).



Figure 6.19: Crocheted Masks, Manchester Town Hall, Manchester, Author's own.

The results of the 'The Stature Project' are, as Warp and Weft put it, 'cartoonish'. The colourful use of yarn produces an almost camouflage-like aesthetic, similar to yarnbomber "Olek" whose work I discussed earlier in this chapter. The masks do not seem to depict any recognisable face, rather they are provocative and evocative objects that question not just the lack of remembrance but also the *ephemerality* of remembering, archival documentation of women, and material practices with which to do so. The 'Stature Project', then, is an intentionally feminist knitting project (Kelley, 2014); it is more 'explicit' activism than 'implicit' – but I want to argue that it still constitutes a 'quiet politics' distinct from more spectacular forms of activism.

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that yarnbombing joined other forms of DIY or guerrilla urbanism that are shaping urban spaces (Iveson, 2013). Collectively, these practices have been characterised as working materially with "liminal spaces, spaces of uncertainty, loose space, and derelict space" (Mikadze, 2015; 520). Less commented on is the propensity for "DIY urbanisms" to address other forms of liminal space, or spaces of uncertainty; for example, in terms of the gendered experience of place through more 'everyday' interventions that re-dress these experiences. These interventions, though 'implicit' or 'quiet', are no less powerful. As Mott and Roberts (2013; 19) note, "it is important to remember that the ways one goes about exploring are determined by, amongst other things, our

unique personal identities, histories, and associations with place”. As I have argued throughout this chapter, the ‘rules’ of yarnbombing are fluid and contextual. It is about paying attention to material politics of place, re-addressing spaces and objects, which are sometimes forgotten or undervalued, and exploring knitting and crochet as a creative practice that can *intervene* in these material politics.

Coda: Making things in miniature or activism through small changes



Figure 6.20: Stoke Newington, Knitted. Author's own.



Figure 6.21: The Jolly Butchers. Stoke Newington knitted. Author's own.

“Miniatures affect space in multiple ways: projecting it, transforming it and co-producing it with those who make and gaze upon models. Scale, place, representation and performance are also central to the process of miniaturisation” (Yarwood, 2015; 655).

As a coda to my discussion of yarnbombing and its quiet activism I want to return to a rather different intervention in place: Stoke Knittington’s Knitted Stoke Newington Common. In Chapter Five, I explored how the knitting group co-operated and co-produced this model, reflecting on the intermingling of social relations and materials that occur in a knitting group working towards a shared project. Now, I briefly want to reflect on what the production of the model achieved as a knitted intervention that is quietly political in its attentiveness to place, environment and community.

Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted the struggle experienced by knitters to have their labours ‘taken seriously’. As Turney (2009) has argued, the ordinariness of knitting belies the skill that goes into it. This was something that the Stoke Newington knitters felt keenly. They were very aware that the significant amount of work, material and craft that produced the model would not be appreciated; cast off as the fruits of ‘older women’ (Interview, February, 2015). To counteract these perceptions, the group reinforced the skill and utility of their labour by referring to its accuracy as a map and model of the common.

“I was worried it was going to be twee. When I came back (from holiday) and saw it wasn’t going to be twee at all it was really going to be something really special – it was looking like, like, I wasn’t sure what I thought it was going to look like but yeah it looked good – like a map. I realised, it’s not going to be sort of ‘Women’s Home’”. So many people, you say ‘*Yes, we’re knitting Stoke Newington Common*’ and they’re like, you know (imitates dramatic yawning). They think you’re wrapping trees, or you know doing something whimsical and they see the model or pictures of it and they think ‘OH –I didn’t think it was going to be like that.’”

(Liz, Interview, February 2014)

It seemed that the knitters were calling into being what J.B Harley (1989) coined ‘the power of the map’ – that is, the power of cartographic representation that means maps can be interpreted as reality, rather than the representations of power that they are. For the Stoke Newington knitters, combining the ‘craft’ of cartography with knitting seemed to connote accuracy and skill. An objective and scientific production, juxtaposed to the vernacular and amateur creativity of the knitted model.

“It had to be an accurate map. It was a good basis for all our knitted things we’d added. It didn’t matter how whimsical it was.”

(Liz, Interview, February, 2014).

Mann (2015) has argued that yarnbombing, as knitted ‘interventions’ are whimsical or playful. Here she echoes earlier broader work on ludic and enchanting geographies (Woodyer, 2012). However, it seems that not all knitters feel comfortable with their work being cast as ‘playful’ because to do so, they felt, belies the skill, craft knowledge and time that projects take. The cartographic authority of the map seemed to validate their Stoke Knittington’s knitterly and crochet pursuits, which were characterised by playfulness, curiosity, and experimentation:

“I mean yeah, it was such an organic thing wasn’t it? I mean, cause I... that’s what I loved about it. Because we didn’t really have an idea, it just developed as we went along.”

(Interview with Liz, February 2014)

The Stoke Newington knitters often referred to the ‘organic’ process of producing the model; in their knitting groups, as I discussed in Chapter Five, it was very much a space of improvisation, tinkering and material inspiration. Underlying this process, though, was also a keen attention to place. Making the model re-made the group’s experience of the Common:

“Yeah, somehow you see the model and you see the shape – it’s this green area among the houses – it’s only small really but it’s an oasis.” (Interview, Joan, February 2014).

“Ivy said she’d never really been on the Common before but she had to for the model, she had to go look. It does make you look more. I’ve always noticed texture and things, but I hadn’t really noticed, I don’t know, I realised I didn’t know the Common very well. You realise, you see it everyday without really looking at it. You see but you don’t look. We really did in this process.”

(Interview, Joan, February 2014)

As Yarwood (2015; 671) puts it, “geographers should not confuse the miniature with the trivial. Far from simplifying the world, miniatures warrant further attention as they have an ability to speak of and for it with perhaps unexpected power and consequence”. The making of a miniature landscape, the crocheting of small trees to populate the model, and so on, encouraged knitters to build relationships to the space of the Common – to extend ethical generosity, as Bennett (2004) puts it.

“I had no idea what a variety of trees we had; I would have hazarded a guess at something like six types of trees or something like that. I didn’t know the names of trees, but I knew them by texture – willowy, furry trees and so on. But there’s no way I would have known them so intimately. I didn’t realise we had so many benches! I’d never spotted it before because it wasn’t the route of the Common I walk along. I’m not sure I’d even walked along the summer meadows before.”

(Joan, Interview, February 2014)

“I think it shows how much the Common has evolved. Since I moved here which was twenty years ago. The Common wasn’t very nice. There was no playground. The hedging wasn’t there. It was a bit scary; it wasn’t somewhere you’d go at night. It’s become user-friendly. It’s like a park. It looks this lovely place now; it looks soft and inviting [indicating the Knitted Common]. People have taken ownership of their Common, which is exactly what you want. When they’ve gone to see it represented – they completely

feel like this space is their's, you know, no one else can touch this model because that's my space and my Common [laughter].”

(Liz, Interview, February 2014)



Figure 6: 22 Stoke Newington Railway, Author's own.

The railway track that runs through Stoke Newington Common was discussed as being aesthetically unpleasing, and unsafe. The knitting group began as a project by Stoke Newington Users Group (SNUG). SNUG look after the Common and promote its use as a green space in the city. As I have already discussed, the group were keen to ‘accurately’ represent and map the Common. However, the railway track provided an unexpected opportunity to enact changes too. There are two tracks that cut across the Common but the knitter ‘in charge’ of producing the railway accidentally only knitted one.

“I knew straight away [there had been a mistake] actually, because Bernie and Rosie came round one evening. Bernie needed more grey wool for the path she was knitting and she was full of apologies. She only realised after she’d finished. I said “No, it’s fine, it’s not exact” and Rosie said ‘See, I told you she wouldn’t be cross!’ and I realised that they’d walked around and been terrified of telling me in case I told them to rip it out and start all over

again and that was never going to happen – it was Bernie’s track and if that’s how she saw it that was great and that’s how it was gonna be. You know it’s not accurate, and actually nobody noticed. They’ve just been like ‘Wow, look at the railway line!’”

(Siobhan, Interview, February 2014)

The one-track railway was an unintentional change to the ‘accuracy’ of the map; the making and the ‘doing’ produced this particular design change and perhaps reflected how its maker, Bernie, saw the park or *wanted* to see the park. As Yarwood (2015; 671) puts it “models do more than represent space, they transform it; rather than simply presenting a uniform vision of space, the ‘fluid and polymorphous process’ of play (Woodyer 2012; 315) opens up many imaginative possibilities”. As Liz echoed:

“The railway track – you know it’s not a very nice feature of the Common but when it was knitted you could kind of imagine Toad and Ratty²² on a steam-train down it or something.”

(Interview, Liz, February 2014).

The group also knitted the Common so that it represented all the seasons, paying close attention to its environmental qualities but presenting these in imagined coexistence:

“The fact is that different parts of the common look better at different times. We’ve got the meadow, we’ve got the spring flowers, and we wanted as much variation as possible.”

(Interview, Liz, February 2014)

“I had always dreamt of having a snowy scene. Well I actually hate snow, so it’s ironic really. But the only photos I really took of the Common in all the years I lived here were a couple of winters ago where everything was covered in snow. I had these photographs and it just struck me that it

²² Toad and Ratty here reference characters from ‘The Wind in the Willows’ (1908), a children’s novel by Kenneth Grahame.

looked rather magical and different. I'm sure it was a conversation round your table Liz [where the group discussed this].”

(Interview, Mary, February 2014)

Cosy and inviting; with amateur qualities that reflect the lived fabric of place; a communal representation of a common place; made in an ‘organic’ process that ‘celebrated all skills’; combining the authority of the map with the eccentricity and idiosyncrasies of the knitted model; not ‘twee’ but presenting a romanticised vision of place; all the seasons, only one railway line. The Knitted Common is a subtle, enchanting intervention in the politics of place.

In Summary

In this chapter I have considered knitting’s role in various sorts of urban intervention. Focusing in particular on practices of yarnbombing, I began at the supposed end, the death of yarnbombing through its embrace by the powerful projects of corporate marketing and Creative City policy. Reports of this death, I suggested, might be somewhat exaggerated, diagnosed through a theoretical narrative that privileges heroic urban interventions by special individuals and groups. The more ordinary narrative I offered instead was, adapting Dickens’ (2008) terminology, of a post-yarnbombing world marked by precarious craft labour. I then turned to the material practices of yarnbombing. Here, I focused on the transience of yarnbombing, drawing out its relations to waste and re-use, decay and renewal. Through an interpretation of Warp and Weft’s Stature Project in Manchester, I then highlighted knitting’s ephemeral qualities, working yarn into an intervention in the absence of women from the city’s monumental landscapes. Finally, as a coda, I turned away from yarn bombing to consider a more representational form, Stoke Knittington’s knitted model of place. It, I suggest, resonates with the quiet activism and small politics of interventionist knitting more generally.

Chapter Seven

Concluding: towards knitted geographies

At the outset of this thesis I identified three ‘surfaces’ that represented key emergent areas of debate with human geographical enquiry that my thesis advanced. These surfaces were: geographies of comfort, quiet geographies, and geographies of amateur creativity. Each of these surfaces represents particular concerns across feminist and cultural geographies that have been materialized through engagement across three substantive chapters developed from empirical investigation across London, South East England, and North West England: *consuming*, through the example of contemporary knitting festivals and events; *connecting* and participation with knitting groups and community groups working together on knitted projects, and *intervening* through knitted street art (otherwise known as yarnbombing) and feminine, or, feminist forms of subversion. The surfaces work to pull together my particular theoretical, conceptual and methodical contribution to the emergent field of ‘geographies of making’: Carr and Gibson (2015; 13) explain ‘making is central to who we are as individuals – what we make as part of everyday practice forms our identities and place in the world’. This thesis advances debate progressed by other geographers investigating making, maker cultures and craft practices in contemporary society (see Thomas *et al*, 2013; Holmes, 2014, Warren and Gibson, 2014, Gibson, 2014, Patchette, 2012; Ocejo, 2013; Collins, 2015). It advances academic developments in making by contributing sustained, critical engagement with one form of crafting: knitting.

As Linda Newington, puts it (2014; 10): “knitting has the potential to initiate discussion and new thinking around hierarchies of art and craft, the domestic and industrial, the personal and political”. The growth of academic interest in making has been co-produced by a ‘craft’ revival, of which knitting has been at the fore (Turney, 2009; Hemmings, 2010). In chapter two I explored conceptual engagements with knitting within academic study so far. It has been argued that knitting may offer an alternative form of consumption: knitting festivals, fairs and events offer opportunities for craft consumption, engagement with more sustainable materials and the production of objects that may be more personable with social and material longevity (see Campbell, 2005). Knitting, is it argued, is

distinct in that it is a convivial, social craft. The portability of materials allows it to move in, and out, of space beyond its historic associations, or confines, in domesticity. Rather, knitting now is found in diverse spaces and thus connects people by producing social and material relations in knitting groups – online and offline (Gauntlett, 2011; Orton-Johnson, 2014; Hemmings, 2010; Newington, 2014). Increasingly, knitting is framed as a form of political or artistic intervention by way of guerrilla knitting, or yarnbombing (Busek *et al*, 2011; Kelly, 2014, Butcher, 2012). As artists, community groups, and amateur knitters produce ‘knitted street’ art assumptions around who gets to be subversive, creative, and challenge urban space and the material, sensuous ways of doing so, are challenged (Price, 2015, Mann, 2015). Whatsmore, running across these critical discussions of knitting is the relationship between craft, feminism and women and their historical and contemporary geographies.

In this chapter now, I engage with three surfaces and their particular textures (as explained neatly through figure 1.1 in chapter one) in order to explore my conceptual contribution to the development of geographies of making and academic study of knitting within human geography. Woodward and Fisher (2014; 10) suggest an understanding of surfaces matter in “debunking the dominant western ontology, which sees surfaces – and– as unimportant, because it is the deep, immaterial ‘inner’ self that is important, rather than the surface, which is superficial and transitory. This dichotomy between an inner self and an outer surface is also played out in the distinction between the material and the spectacular – presumed to be immaterial”. On surfaces, geographers have suggested, “as well as conventional ontologies and epistemologies which assume that surfaces and interfaces exist where different materialities are juxtaposed. Relational and processual philosophies may circumvent, rethink, or deny the presence of such surface structures, highlighting the networked, fluid, turbulent, or topological relations which exist in the material world, weaving together all manner of things” (Forsyth *et al*, 2013; 1016). (Woodward and Fisher, 2014; 10). Simply put, it makes sense to revisit surfaces in this concluding chapter for two reasons. Firstly, as they display, thematically, the contribution of the thesis to disciplinary developments by bringing together currents that run throughout the research and empirical investigations. Secondly, one of the main arguments of the thesis is the importance of engaging with material,

fabric, with surface and to show that ‘surface’ is not superficial, or belying an inner truth underneath, rather surfaces are themselves produced, material, important, and in process.

The conclusions I present here use these empirical results grouped under three *surfaces* by way of pulling together the feminist geographical *threads* that run throughout: a focus on **bodies**, women’s **spaces**, and gendered creative **practices**. The *texture* of these threads I have identified as: **everyday, social, material, public, implicit, skill, material, maintenance, and ordinary**. Whilst perhaps knotty, complicated, entangled, or unraveling these conclusions not only speak to the metaphorical framework of knitting a thesis, but also the messy reality of social life, social research and the production of knowledge (Law, 2004). To continue the metaphor, as Turney (2014; 26) states, “with each knitted loop, the fabric is formed and a deliberate hole made, an imperfection which contributes to the creation of the whole”. So in concluding this chapter, I finish by sketching out holes, for further loops or stitches to be made for future research into feminist geographies of making and the academic study of knitting.

Geographies of Comfort

Throughout this thesis I articulated a focus on the particular social and material sensation of comfort; a term, which I argue, usefully captures the paradoxical, emotional, affective and bodily geographies felt throughout this ethnographic research. As Bissell (2008; 1697) argues, “comfort is a highly complex sensibility and one that requires sustained attention to the nuances therein”. For Miller and Woodward (2012; 83) comfort embraces three sematic fields “(1) a more physical and instrumental meaning; (2) the need to feel comfortable, in the sense of what is appropriate, under the gaze of others within a public situation; and (3) the longer-term process by which people find a sense of who they are, their personal comfort zone.” Comfort then, is a term that usefully brings together geographical debates on affective and emotional worlds (Pile, 2010), alongside on-going concerns with material worlds and the comfort of things (Miller, 2010; Crang, 2014; Gregson, 2007) and historical feminist geographical commitment to unpacking the politics of comfort (Brickell, 2011, Holliday, 1992). In sketching out a geographical focus on

‘making things’, comfort is useful and important, in articulating bodily experiences of making and relationships to materials, things and objects. Knitting, I argue, interrogates these geographies of comfort across three registers: the material, social and public.

Material

Seeking to explore material comfort and discomfort, I began with a focus on material in chapter four, by exploring the worlds of knitting festivals and events as spaces of craft consumption that offer the potential and possibility of consuming things differently. In chapter four I introduced Wool House (2013); the slogan for which was “Wool is all about comfort and beauty”. Wool, yarns and knitting we are told, offer material comfort (Turney, 2012; Turney, 2014). The festivals and events I explored in chapter four were multi-sensorial worlds of touch, tactility and texture – through a politics of display and performance these worlds encouraged attendees to engage with wool. From the knitted signs at Unravel, to the woollen rooms in Wool House these spaces of craft consumption are spaces of haptic, kinaesthetic engagement – a circulation of comfort in not only material terms, but also bodily terms, as the craft consumer *feels* their way around the space (Miller, 2013). In chapter four, I also illustrated how the comfort of wool becomes valued as a material luxury; that some may be unable to afford, or have access to but will consume through geographical imaginations of wool production at festivals – or indeed, be absent from these spaces completely.

Geographers engaging with urban interventions and creative, bodily experiences of the city have often focused on particular material and sensorial qualities. In chapter six, I explored how knitters who do guerrilla graffiti bring new material experiences to the fore that remind us of the role of textiles in urban spaces, and how urban spaces can be tactile (Crewe, 2011). In counterpoint to suggestions that that textile interventions comfort or domesticate space in easy (or feminine) ways, I was concerned rather with how they *interrogate* our experience of place in terms of comfort and discomfort (familiarity, or habit) through the material politics of knitted fabric and its historical associations with home, warmth and care. Knitters, would often use the terms, ‘therapeutic’ ‘cosy’, ‘soothing’ ‘comforting’ ‘familiar’

‘inviting’ ‘homely’ to describe the sensation of comfort they felt, or they hoped recipients of their knits would feel. Equally, they used the terms ‘itchy’ ‘cheap’ ‘scratchy’ to illustrate how some yarns (acrylic) were difficult to work with. In chapter three, I highlighted that although geographers have begun to employ creative methods to ‘get at’ more-than-human qualities and socio-material relations, I argued that knitters, and makers more broadly, are well equipped to talk about their practices and sensory experiences – and as researchers, we should not underestimate their expertise in doing so (Hitchings, 2012; Pink, 2015). I also suggested in chapter three that sometimes photography or visual methods matter because they represent materiality of objects in ways that other methods fail. So, throughout this thesis I have used photographs to document, or evoke material qualities – comforting and discomforting.

Social

Holliday (1995: 489) suggests, “Perhaps comfort is to be feared, since it is discomfort, displacement, disruption which moves politics (and selves) forward into a more complex and less exclusive or complacent place”. Social comfort then is a process that is achieved in collaboration with other bodies; in an expanded sense, in this thesis I have shown how the oscillation between social comfort and discomfort is a both a material process and a process framed around material bodies. For example, I highlighted the role of “Best in Show” at knitting festivals to refer to the broader aim of festivals to bring together like-minded enthusiasts to appreciate, compete and compare their knitting (which was often most easily displayed by wearing cardigans or jumpers at the festival itself). In doing so, enthusiasts become are comforted by being appreciated for their identities as knitters, rather than wider (gendered) subjectivities (Fullagar, 2012). In chapter five, I suggested ways that knitting groups may provide bodily and social comfort through participation and ‘doings’. Again, these spaces provided a place to be appreciated ‘as knitters’ – this facilitated comfort in the form of friendship and caring relations (Bowlby, 2011; Bowlby, 2012; Brunell *et al*, 2012); knitting groups then are spaces of care through their material and social comfort.

Knitting then, is a complex practice of social and material comfort. I have tried to avoid reinforcing knitting as comforting in a deterministic or negative sense. Rather comfort is a term, that through its dependency on discomfort; reflects the complex social and material politics of comfort as lively, more than human, and co-productive. These particular politics are harnessed, I have argued in the production, practice and materials of knitted interventions. In doing so, they offer an alternative to masculinist geographies of urban subversions that focus on the individual, and dualisms of the **Creative City** and the **creative city** (Mould, 2015). So, in chapter six, I introduced the idea of gendered ‘post-graffiti worlds’ (Dickens, 2008) – suggesting the term ‘post-yarnbombing’; and the politics of artists who make knitted interventions on the street, and in the gallery. These practices, journeys and places have a social politics because of the histories of care, generosity and the persistent under-valuing of gendered, craft labour (Hughes, 2011).

Public

For Sara Ahmed (2010; 156), “comfort is about an encounter between more than one body, which is the promise of a ‘sinking’ feeling. To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one’s environment that it is hard to distinguish where one’s body ends and the world begins”. In this definition of comfort, certain bodies disrupt wider public comfort; and certain bodies feel out of place and less comfortable as a result of embodied fear, or feelings. Throughout the production of this thesis, this concept has been at the fore. Particularly, because within contemporary knitting circles the idea of ‘knitting in public’ is debated, celebrated, and often practiced. The broader popular and academic narrative around ‘knitting in public’ suggests that there is a move of domesticated craft into the public realm that is both disruptive and unexpected. In this thesis, I hope I have portrayed a more nuanced story demonstrated by ethnographic research with diverse knitters. For Ella, knitting in public was practical, therapeutic and political. For Chelsea, knitting publically was a source of discomfort; the pejorative stereotyping of knitting as grandmotherly was *felt* through her young body as ‘too old fashioned’ to display.

There is also an argument that I feel I did not fully explore, on the relationship of classed identities to *bodies* that feel comfortable, or not, to knit, or make things

publically. For example, Carer's U Knitted is, I have argued, a space of care or a 'comfort zone' precisely because it was intimate, familiar and *safe* for those who attended. This was not a story of domestic confinement, but rather the knitting group at the Carer's Centre provided a space out of the everyday that was comforting materially, socially and publically. The space and place, or the 'where', knitting takes place can be therefore considered political because of its relationship to material, social and public comfort.

Quiet Geographies

This thesis advances engagement with an emergent interest within Human Geography of quiet geographies (Askins, 2015; Askins, 2014). These geographies bring together attention to everyday practices, ordinary consumption, and implicit activism. They are shaped by a feminist ethic of care that promotes potential of slowness, community mindedness, and participatory and collaborative working that recognises the impact of small, local, everyday changes and challenges accelerated and strident geographies (Mountz *et al*, 2015). So then, quiet geographies can *make* worlds, if we are attentive to them: as Kanngieser (2013: 348) puts it, "how we say things, and not just what we say, has significant effects on our capacities to listen and respond to one another, effects that also play out on the level of the political". Feminist geographers have long engaged with (or, listened to) the quiet spaces of mundane, everyday or ordinary geographies. But, less attention has been paid to the *political* and socially transformative potential of material practices that take place in these spaces (Jupp, 2007). Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to be attentive to these spaces, to highlight their political import. As a basic level in this thesis I have 'listened' to spaces of knitting and knitter's worlds that have been neglected, or overlooked because the craft is historically women's work and gendered creative practice. Quiet geographies, I suggest, create, make, or unmake worlds precisely '*in the doing*' but also in being attentive to others because they are 'simultaneously informed by the conditions of both the speaker and the recipient' (Kanngieser, 2013: 345). By being quiet, or by listening we may "find ways for us to speak in common, with conviviality and with care" (Kanngieser, 2013: 348). In this section of my concluding chapter, I focus on the quiet geographies that I have explored

theoretically, methodologically and empirically across three textures: everyday, ordinary and implicit.

Ordinary

An argument that has continually informed the development of this research has been that, “knitting represents a democracy of objects and practices, so prolific, so mundane that it isn’t noticed; it’s taken for granted. Its cultural stigma belies its complexities and skill – knitting is overlooked” (Turney 2009; 5). It has been in this academic and popular lacuna that I developed the research presented in this thesis; knitting as democratic, mundane, and unnoticed. In addressing knitting as ordinary I attend to feminist concerns with familiarity, domestic routines, skill, and spaces that are inclusive or exclusive for women (Rose, 1993). In this section I show how my research has advanced geographical engagements around forms of ordinary forms of consumption through engaging with craft, lifestyles and identities in these spaces, and the role of domesticity in their shaping, or how these can shape domestic space. Knitting can *intervene* in these routines, practices and rituals of consumption to offer a sensory pleasurable alternative (Soper, 2008). At the same time, I am mindful for some that knitting continues to be a form of ordinary, domestic practice – which is no less sensory, emotional, or important (Pink, 2015; Pink, 2012).

Miller and Woodward (2013; 99) in their exploration of denim found that in its ubiquity, the notion of ‘ordinary’ afforded a radical egalitarianism: “this is an ordinariness that many people wish to identify with, but commensurate with the term ordinary, this identification is rarely an assertive or activist claim. Rather, we hear a quiet and modest claim to occupy some kind of untroubled middle ground of existence that is unobtrusive”. So, it is in the ordinariness, the quiet on-goingness, of knitting as a fabric that is comforting and familiar, in which it becomes democratic – people identify with it. Returning to the work of artist Clare Sams, as discussed in chapter one, this ‘ordinariness’ encourages participation and sharing of stories, skills, materials and time: ordinary. In doing so, the ordinary can be quietly assertive and enact local, small scale exchanges that can be in someway transformative socially, materially and politically.

Knitters documented across this thesis often described their practice as ordinary, precisely because it was practiced, routinized and a learnt skill (Warde *et al*, 2008). For knitters, such as Joan, as discussed in chapter five knitting is simply, ‘something I’ve always done’. As I illustrated, knitting in the home often creatively re-casts domestic space. In doing so, it draws attention to how we might configure care, love, and reproductive labour as skilled practices (Cox, 2013; Munro, 2013); therefore de-naturalizing any assumptions about women’s innate capacity to look after others. Chapter six examined how ordinary practices of waste, use, re-use; recycling, and dis-investments shaped the production of knitted interventions. It did so in two ways: firstly, it used materials that were considered ‘waste’ by other knitters – it thereby reflected much more broader circulations of value and de-valuing. This included, yarns salvaged from waste disposal ‘tips’; wool gifted from deceased family members’ over-accumulation, and even crocheted Tam O’Santas bought at car boot sales. Secondly, in the ‘sorting out’ of these materials the creative, extra-ordinary, process of producing yarnbombs, were dependent upon the routines and rituals of ordinary practices: sorting, re-working, mending, and even cleaning – as the PurlQueens showed in their maintenance of their decaying yarnbombs.

Everyday

For feminist geographies, the everyday has long been politically important. As Dyck (2005; 234) argued, “we need close attention to the spaces of everyday life to keep women visible in rapidly changing world conditions, where their activities tend to slip into the shadows of dominant models in the literature”. Across this thesis the everyday has been important in terms of spaces I have engaged; in my sketching out of this research as an ethnographic experience in chapter three I introduced my interest in the day-to-day experience of: knitting in homes, at knitting groups, and knitters who produce interventions. I suggested that social media was an increasingly methodological, participatory and public tool for geographers to employ in research and academic life (Pickerill, 2013; Kitchin *et al*, 2013). However, I also cautioned that the temporality of this new media might become burdensome and affect research relationships beyond the life of a project: which though participatory in some respects, requires a politics of maintenance. In chapter three, I

also suggested that whilst contemporary enthusiasm for knitting was increasingly shaped, (or co-produced) by online platforms I felt politically committed to engaging with the everyday lives of knitters who were disconnected from these worlds. I did so by recruiting through family and friends.

This thesis is concerned with spatialities and temporalities of the everyday. It has suggested that craft consumption and hand-making is framed as a form of everyday resistance to the alienating efforts of contemporary consumerist society (Soper, 2008; Watson, 2008; Campbell, 2005). So, in chapter four we see how knitting festivals and events can offer an alternative: slower temporalities, and more broadly, local changes to global concerns of consumer culture through handmaking. In this sense, the everyday becomes a space of *quiet* political change. However, I have suggested we might be critical of the potential moral geographies of consumption hand-making may afford. I do so, by continually acknowledging how *material* decisions are shaped by geographies of responsibility and complex caring practices (Massey, 2005; Cox, 2012; Miller, 1998) – not everyone has space within the their everyday to carve out time to hand-make.

So, this thesis is concerned with the politics of everyday: temporalities, spatialities and, as I attempted to advance in chapter six, histories. The work of Warp and Weft, and the production of crocheted masks for the Stature Project highlighted yarnbombing as a feminist intervention. It did so firstly, as a form of ‘everyday urbanism’ – concerned with intervening into mundane geographies of urban habit (Mann, 2015). Secondly, it did more than attempt to ‘re-write’ women into the spaces of Manchester Town Hall. Rather, it used a different materiality and representation technique all together to do so (Irigaray, 1993); the materials, materiality and tools of crochet allowed Warp and Weft to make everyday portraits of the inspirational women and in doing so re-make the process of remembering (with an emphasis on their everyday, personal lives).

Implicit

In this final section on quiet geographies agenda I want to focus on the register of the implicit. I have advanced this term from Horton and Kraftl (2009; 14) who use

‘implicit’ to articulate a focus on implicit activism that are: “small scale, personal, quotidian, and proceed with very little fanfare”. In chapter six, I fleshed out how knitted interventions worked as activist, or subversive creative practices because of their *implicit* activism – they are small, personal, and less spectacular than more masculinist geographies of ‘taking back the city’ (see Garratt, 2011). If geographies of comfort (material, social and public) are about *bodies*, then quiet geographies (ordinary, everyday, implicit) are about *practices* – but also the (small) *scale*.

I approached scale methodologically, the result is a thesis that uses various ‘small stories’ to flesh out a wider narrative (Lorimer, 2003). I have tried to resist *big* theories. In chapter five, in my engagement with Hammerknit, Stoke Knittington, and Carer’s U Knitted I described the social and material micro-practices of these spaces through the making of knitted Christmas trees for a group project – the sharing of yarn, the passing over of scissors, the teaching of a new skill, and ‘have you tried it this way?’ These implicit gestures *materialise* place, and in their convivial and transformative power demonstrate quiet political geographies. Stoke Knittington creatively materialised place in their production of a miniature landscape and representation of their common. As Yarwood (2014; 655) argues, “miniatures affect space in multiple ways: projecting it, transforming it and co-producing it with those who make and gaze upon models. Scale, place, representation and performance are also central to the process of miniaturisation”. In this material process, knitters paid attention to their local (more-than-human) environment and community, representing and enacting a *quiet geographies* of place. The danger of miniatures, or the small scale, is romanticisation, but implicit geographies I argue are not just tacit, unspoken gestures, but rather are implied too, suggestions, understatement. This does not, I argue, make them politically potential, or any less affective forms of world-making, but it does require that we are attentive and listen to them (Kanngieser, 2013). As such, and following Kanngieser, we might think of the worldly ethics and politics that propagate from the cultivation of such attentive worldly attitudes.

Geographies of amateur creativities

This thesis has been formulated by a central concern of attending to creative practices that is in some way amateur or, vernacular. In doing so, I have hoped to re-address the “privileging of particular notions of creativity within geography” (Edensor *et al*, 2009: 6). In our pursuit of quiet geographies and listening to them (Kannigieser, 2013) I argue, geographers should expand the *spaces* that we listen to and the bodies that are making practices that produce these spaces. In her work on embroidery, Parker (2010; 215) argues that “for women today, the contradictory and complex history of embroidery is important because it reveals that definitions of sexual difference, and the definitions of art and artists so weighted against women, are not fixed. They have shifted over the centuries, and they can be transformed in the future”. By actively listening to spaces of knitting and knitters academic research should pay attention to the transformations and shifts in this craft that reflect the transformation and shifts in the taking seriously of women’s creative practices, and subsequently the value of gendered forms of making. In this thesis I hope to have advanced this debate by engaging with contemporary knitting now and the ‘transformations’ it has undertaken that are often contradictory and certainly never fixed.

This thesis began its life in London; focusing on urban space and experience. Yet, I soon found myself, back in my hometown of Warrington, Cheshire researching knitting groups that I had read about in the local paper. I had found them, not through social media; but from a small newspaper cut out posted to London by my friend who’d thought of my thesis. In pursuit of amateur creativities beyond the city, I soon found myself visiting the Knitting Ne’er De Wells, in Aldershot, Hampshire; my best friend’s Grandmother in Margate, Kent; Unravel festival in Farnham, Surrey, and PurlQueens in Folkestone, Kent. I pursued a “broader conception of creativity, one that recognises its practices outside of the city” (Edensor *et al*, 2009; 7); these spaces of amateur creativity then, take place in ‘ordinary cities’ and suburban spaces (Bell and Jayne, 2006).

Certainly, I have remained committed to the quiet and comforting potential of knitting groups in the creation and experience of the urban fabric, and within

international cities such as London (Price, 2015). However, I hope that this thesis has shown that amateur creativity can widen the plethora of *spaces* we engage in as geographers; important in this is how classed and gendered identities shape experience and value creativity differently, or rather have different creative values. In doing so, I have been invested in illustrating in my engagement with knitting as a particular ‘making’ practice across diverse *spaces*. I have visited traditional workshops, studios, museums and galleries; but I have mostly found creativity in cafes in rather ordinary spaces: Hammersmith highstreet, living rooms in Stoke Newington, kitchens and conservatories in the homes of family and friends, farms in the middle of the City, weekly gatherings in pubs, and of course, on the street, with trees, bollards and fences. In this final surface of ‘geographies of amateur creativities’ I sketch out my empirical and conceptual contribution to geographical engagements with creative practices, making, and feminist ways of doing. I do so across three final textures: making, maintenance and repair.

Skill

Amateur creativities are distinct because their *doings*: “negotiate limitations of skill, space and time, motivated by the desire to temporarily control their own labour” (Knott, 2015; xviii). In this thesis I have felt a tension between displaying the undervalued skill, proficiency and talent of knitters whilst also making space for ad-hoc, improvised, poor quality materials, labour and craft. The point being that making is not always about end product but rather what is *made* in the making: social relations, gendered bodies, and spaces. Engaging with amateur creativities they allows not only for an understanding of skill on a spectrum, but also acknowledging the skill of crafts such as knitting that are neglected by their amateur status. In chapter six, I showed how knitters use yarnbombing as a tool to display, make-use of, and showcase knitting beyond utility, function and expectations of perfection and art objects. This is a necessarily feminist concern because if we are to engage with spaces of participation, the materiality of their production, and work collaboratively we need to be prepared to engage with various skill sets and learn from each other (Askins and Pain, 2014, Jupp, 2015).

It is also a feminist concern because much amateur creativity has histories and roots in domestic space: as either part of domestic life, or in terms of their negotiation in home (Gregson, 2007). Knitting is both in, and of the domestic, and in chapter five I highlighted the tensions of amateur crafting and skill that exist over generations and across politics such as Feminism that may work to empower some, whilst disempowering others – particularly in relation to class and gender politics. So then, feminist geographers should be encouraged to continue engagement with ‘skill’ and the way it shapes bodies in particular ways (in an embodied sense) but also in terms of producing identities.

Methodologically, I cautioned that geographers should be careful in their approach to amateur creativities. Whilst these spaces encourage participation, collaboration between individuals, collectives and in-between participants and researchers – we should respect that amateur skills; though connotative of inexperience, learning, process – are still practiced, learnt and reflect time and effort on part of the do-er. Geographers, I argue, should be careful not to colonise these spaces and instead I suggested how traditional methods such as interviews might be enriched to sit alongside participatory methods but that ultimately give participants a voice, acknowledge their skill, researcher skill, and co-produce knowledge in collaborative, material ways (Dowling *et al*, 2015; Woodward, 2015).

Maintenance

In chapter one, I introduced contemporary valorisation of ‘making as connecting’. As David Gauntlett (2011; 5) explains: “now, with a revitalized sense of their own creative powers, and helpfully connected to ideas and people via the flourishing internet, people feel more like vibrant agents, rather than observers, in the world”. In short, ‘making is connecting’ because it is collaborative, participatory and *feels* good (in an embodied sense, but also expanded: more caring, more agentic in context of consumerist cultures). Academic study of contemporary making cultures and knitting in particular may be characterised by geographies of friendship, love, conviviality and positive emotional geographies: joy, enchantment, enthusiasm etc. (see Geoghagen and Woodyer, 2014).

However, I want to suggest that these connections require *maintenance* if they are to be productive affective and emotional worlds. As Graham and Thrift (2007; 17) explains: “maintenance and repair is an on-going process, but it can be designed in many different ways in order to produce many different outcomes and these outcomes can be more or less efficacious: there is, in other words, a *politics* of repair and maintenance”. In this thesis I engage with the particular methods through which knitters maintain spaces of amateur creativity in distinct ways that speak to feminist engagement with gender, skill, and creative practices. For example, in chapter four, I suggested the affective atmosphere of fibre festivals and exhibitions were co-produced between institutions, knitters, and materials. These spaces require active participation. So in chapter four, I introduced the concept of ‘warm expertise’ that produce a friendly, affective atmosphere that encourages multiple bodies and skills to co-produce affective worlds. In doing so, I have concluded earlier that they are ‘comforting’ in their conviviality and openness. However, the material worlds of knitting, I argue require maintenance to produce these participatory, convivial spaces that are enjoyable. In chapter five, and to a lesser extent, chapter four I suggested that these spaces may not be open to all – therefore questioning, who maintains this spaces? Who becomes written out, or unable to participate because they do not have access to materials, or luxury of time? Moreover, what connections made through knitting are neglected because they exist outside of group situations. In chapter five I highlighted the *connections* made by grandmotherly knitters in their home. Often, the positive experience of knitting as connective, convivial and social is made at the expense of the lone grandmotherly figure that knits because historically they *had* to. But, rather I found that grandmothers were empowered by their knitting and their craft practice maintained family connections, love, emotions and labour in their homes.

Knitting groups, I have argued, are particular spaces that enact a politics of maintenance and repair of social relations and friendships. Knitting groups, I illustrated in chapter five, through informal membership, participation and identity based on skills and projects do not burden those who attend with the usual practices of maintenance that friendships may require (Bowlby, 2011). Rather, the material doing of knitting groups and crafting together: knitting, sewing, looping, felting, stitching become practices of caring for others and for the self and therefore

knitting is a form of amateur creativity with diverse geographies of social, bodily, and material maintenance. So, in chapter five I discussed the “knit-for list” and how it functioned as a way knitters maintained personal relationships through their projects. Through this, knitted objects came to represent love and affection. For example, Ella removed her mother-in-law from her knit for list following an offensive remark about her ‘hobby’; therefore non-knitting may signal the end to some relationships. Recurrent throughout my interviews with knitters was the importance of knitting as a source of well-being and way of caring for the self. This links to recent developments within feminist geographies on embodied practices and therapeutic mobilities (Gattrell, 2013); knitting, I would argue, as a hobby, as an amateur creativity, through which makers carve out time for themselves, is a form of bodily maintenance.

Repair

The act of repair, in a broader sense, can refer to the mending of clothes, or the repairing of human and social relationships; if so, as Spelman (2002; 31) puts it, “when we think of repair in this larger sense, it can seem as if women spend – or, anyway, are expected to spend – an enormous amount of time doing repair work”. In this thesis I have attempted to explore the role of gender in shaping experiences, place and practices of amateur creativity. I have been invested in how knitting, as a historical form of ‘women’s work’, has a complex politics of empowerment and disempowerment that works across amateur creativity and registers of work, leisure, and labour. Repair then, evokes notions of utility, function, restoration and the role of creativity in producing something new from old. Throughout this thesis I have suggested that knitters are skilled repairers in some ways and in doing so seek to recognise the *skill* of care, love, and labour.

In a previous research project on flower shops, I found that professional florists employed various forms of ‘repair’ through their material, emotional and affective labours. Floristry, I argued, was an act of repair because it involved working with materialities that are already decaying in some ways. In a more expanded sense, floristry counted as repair work because flowers were purchased and ordered as gifts, or markers of respect for funerals, illnesses, weddings etc. As a result, families

came to rely upon florists as more than ‘just’ a craftsperson, or producer but as a friend, or support network. This meant, for some florists, that economic labour became emotional labour, and emotional labour was part of floristry as work. This blurred the lines between paid and unpaid labour – an on-going concern for feminist geographers. The gendered nature of craft work as repair and the ‘tension’ between material, bodily, emotional, affectual, economic and cultural labours shapes by geographical commitment to developing a feminist geographies of making that is attention to the *making of* more than material products.

In chapter four, I illustrated how spaces of consumer culture that focus on the promotion, production and consumption of fibre, wool and yarn attempt to repair our relationship to materials through advocacy of hand-making and the promotion of wool as a natural fibre. In doing so, they try to repair our connections to things and where they come from (Cook et al, 2003; Cook *et al*, 2011); by performing and displaying non-humans (sheep) and constructing geographical imaginations around places of production. These spaces of craft consumption then work in moral, ethical, and political ways to encourage amateur creativity and future making and knitting, rather than further consumption of fast-fashion and ready-made. In chapter five, I illustrated the creativity of repair and making practices of knitters in the home and the making, mending and darning activities they enact in domestic space. In doing so, I showed how creativity in the home has a complex politics of repair and maintenance of things, that relates to the repair and maintenance of family connections and relations (Miller, 2009). I also sought to advance feminist geographical debates on skill, embodied practice and making, DIY, and repair (Cox, 2015, Cox, 2016, Pickerill, 2015). In the act of repairing, Spelman (2002; 4) argues, “both repairer and restorer want to pick up a thread with the past. Their work appears to involve something distinctly different from the original creation”. In painting portraits of grandmotherly knitters, I attempted to illustrate the creativity, connectivity and conviviality of their practices that are often neglected, or utilised to affirm the contemporary pursuit of knitting by younger generations who ‘re-work’ these associations. In doing so, I hope I have *repaired* some of these geographies.

In chapter six, I revealed how amateur knitters enacted small repairs to their local community and often, urban spaces, through DIY or guerrilla activisms. By being

attentive and descriptive of the *making* practices of knitted interventions I highlighted a politics of use and re-use of yarns, knitted objects and materials in their production. I illustrated how yarnbombing is a particularly *convivial* creative practice through which knitters repair their communities and histories of place. As part of the contemporary buzz around knitting and its renewed creativity there have been vibrant debates on the role of feminism and feminist politics in shaping the craft and knitted interventions (Kelly, 2014). I found that some knitters did not necessarily make yarnbombs as part of a feminist politics, but I would suggest that their motives were implicitly feminist. Working across registers of ephemerality, precarity and transience knitters enact a politics of repair to urban spaces, communities, and environments so that other people's experience of place is improved.

Knitted geographies: towards feminist geographies of making

Cultural geographies of knitting

In this final chapter, I have illustrated how my research has brought together theories and concepts from across cultural and feminist geographies and advanced debate across three surfaces: geographies of comfort, quiet geographies, and geographies of amateur creativities. Broadly, this thesis contributes empirically to wider geographical debate and engagement with 'making', which, as David Paton (2013; 1086) has argued "is resolutely political, a geographical imperative". As Carr and Gibson (2015; 1) explain, "making is fundamental to our being – as humans we make bodies, homes, identities and memories every day. As a society we make landscapes, cities, decisions and structures for governing. And in daily work, the stuff that surrounds us is made".

Craft theorists, academics from within fashion and textile, and art history have engaged with knitting, but cultural geography has so far overlooked this historic form of making. As Turney (2009; 1) states: "knitting is generally understood as ordinary, unchanging, and what it represents and means is so culturally constructed and embedded that it is assumed there is nothing more to say". But rather, "knitting allows makers to not 'just' make things, but to communicate ideas, forge

relationships, and make sense of and comment on the world around them.” (Turney, 2009; 221). Geographers engaging with making, and contemporary thought more generally, have been quick to celebrate the potential of the hand-made, hand-knitted, and experience of making as slow, pleasurable, positive, and “good” for the environment, people, and places. Whilst, this may be so, especially in an increasingly fast-paced, neoliberal and environmental challenged world, I hope this thesis has provided a cautionary tale of the politics of craft that must not be overlooked in understanding the geographies of making, and the geographies *that are made* through making things. Cultural geography is characterized by various recurrent tensions, which Crang (2010; 194) identifies as: “the immaterial and material, the theoretical and substantive, the natural and cultural”, but more particularly, “the tension between the significant and insignificant, the small and the mighty, the trivial and the momentous (ibid)”. In this thesis I have shown how knitting works between these tensions to advance debates in cultural geography on making and gendered, creative, amateur practice and relationships to particular materials. As Turney, 2009 (211) puts it, “knitting is very much part of our visual and material world, and its existence generates discourses that provide evidences of practices otherwise marginalized or ignored”. Feminist geographers are well equipped to explore the way that creative practices, skills and material relationships that are overlooked indeed *produce* worlds in particular ways, and are indeed *produced* by the bodies, identities and spaces.

Future holes for research?

In this thesis I have purposely focused on knitting and women’s live, stories, and experiences. This was both an ontological and epistemological decision to rectify the neglect of knitting in academic geography, which I believe to be related to its particular gendering as a craft. However, I have also been concerned with ‘less visible’ knitters in craft communities and their social relations. So then, moving forward it would be important to research men who knit and their experiences of femininity and masculinity through making. Myzelev (2012; 121) explains that historically: “knitting was taught to girls in the midtwentieth century in public schools in North America and England in the hopes of making them better homemakers. Knitting was also used as a rehabilitative tool for the visually

impaired. Thus, knitting was perceived as unworthy of the status of a 'real man's pursuit'. In spite of several exceptions, such as the British knitter and designer Kaffe Fassett, contemporary western culture perpetuates the stereotype of knitting as a feminine activity". In my research, I only really encountered one male knitter: Tom of Holland (introduced in chapter four) but during research and Wool Week, 2013 I noted that John Lewis provided 'men only' knitting classes through knitting collective Wool and the Gang²³. Feminist geographers are concerned with both gendered experience and gender equality and latterly, gendered experience of skill, so it makes sense, and is indeed, politically imperative to engage with male knitters in order to explore how knitting shapes identities and bodies in particular ways, and how some bodies may feel in, or out of place.

This thesis was concerned with neglected spaces of amateur creativity that have been overlooked by geographical studies of the creative economy because they are in some way vernacular, re-negotiate parameters of taste and value, and are often inscribed with particular classed and gendered values (see Edensor *et al*, 2009). However, in my research I worked with knitters', notably yarnbombers, who's work became increasingly professionalised and part of the Creative City. As Luckman (2013; 262) explains: "craft entrepreneurialism is more than 'an extension of thrifty housewifery and of "making do" removed from the sphere of the monetary marketplace. Rather, it is precisely the kind of pro-am creative entrepreneurialism enabled by the social and economic expansion of the Internet". Feminist geographers, such as Carol Ekinsmyth (2011; 2013), have been concerned with gendered and emergent forms of entrepreneurial businesses "that are not merely (or even necessarily) located in the home, but creatively use the home, mother role and child oriented neighbourhood space(s) to do business" (Ekinsmyth, 2013; 1230). Engaging with self-taught, amateur knitters who have progressed to run businesses online via Etsy, Ravelry, or Not On The Highstreet would be fruitful to advance debates on the spatial politics of knitting that interrogate (artificial, but no less pervasive) boundaries of public/private work/leisure etc. through craft economies and gendered forms of entrepreneurialism.

²³ "<http://www.campaignforwool.org/event-item/knit-nation/>

Empirically, this research was based in the UK, and indeed many contemporary geographical studies of craft and making are based in the Global North and Australia. In order to produce much fuller geographies of making and knitting, I would encourage further research with craft outside of the Global North. In her work on African beadwork Daya (2014; 829) explains, “the learning, making and trading processes involved in the production of African beadwork are, it is clear, always already social and cultural, shaping the individuals concerned and their relationships with others. Through the recognition of production as a culturally rich and dynamic sphere, the figure of the Southern producer can begin to be reimagined”. Though not discussed in the thesis I interviewed knitter Anna Maltz on her project Ricefield Collective²⁴ that involved facilitating community knitting groups in the Philippines that sought to empower women and provide them with freedom, income, and support outside of their domestic relationships. The portability of knitting allows knitters to work around family, community and agricultural commitments and provides a pleasure, embodied experience for women living in Ifugao region of the Philippines.

²⁴ <https://knittedgeographies.wordpress.com/2013/04/17/knitting-for-life-ricefield-collective/>

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